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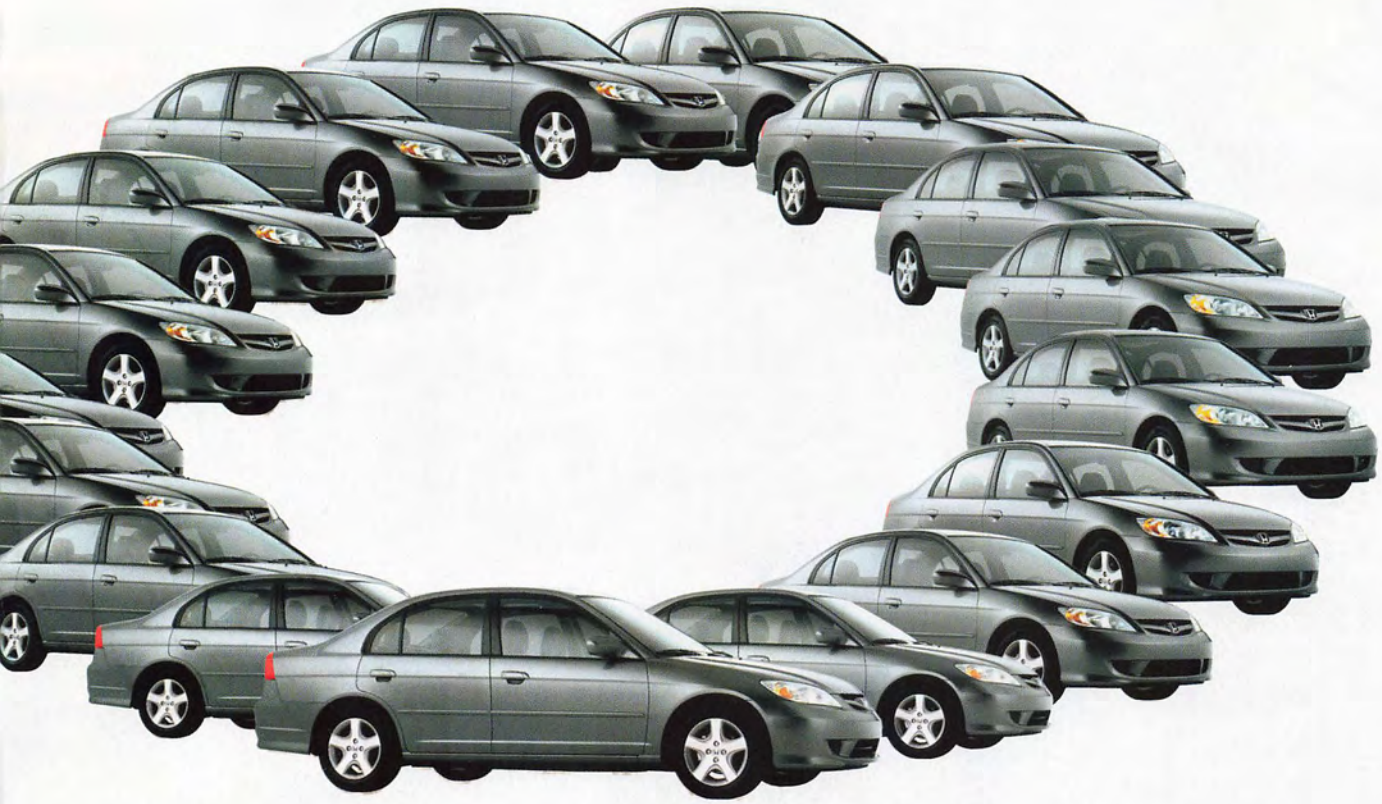

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["You know what, Christina? You're scary." BRITNEY SPEARS, p84]

BLENDER

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58 ON TOUR WITH BLINK-182
Blender hits the road with the juvenile pop-punkers to discover that they're now all serious and grown-up. Apart from porn-watching. And short-sheeting. And grossing out DJs. And . . .

64 KELIS
She has waged war with a record label, fired P. Diddy and gotten engaged to Nas. Is Kelis confident or just reckless? *Blender* goes for a bumpy joyride with the 24-year-old diva to find out.

66 ROCK STAR GURUS
Holy praying pop stars! We investigate rock's spiritual advisers, from Madonna's rabbi to the Beatles' yogi to . . . Elvis's hairdresser. Plus: Are you guru material?

72 THE LONG, SLOW DEATH OF ELLIOTT SMITH
Elliott Smith said many times that he would never commit suicide. But then, he also said he would never do crack. *Blender* investigates why one of the most talented singer-songwriters of his generation was wrong on both counts.

78 $848: THE OFFSPRING
How hard can it be for two punk-rock legends, armed with nearly a grand of *Blender*'s cash, to bail a pal out of jail? Not so difficult — unless they're totally drunk.

80 33 THINGS ABOUT TUPAC SHAKUR
He shot up his own couch with an AK-47. He did jail time before he was even born. He studied ballet. And 30 other fascinating facts about the late hip-hop hero.

84 BRITNEY SPEARS
The onetime Mouseketeer now claims to smoke 9 million cigarettes a day and wants to bring people together so they can talk about masturbation. And you don't even *want* to know what she has to say about Christina Aguilera. Actually, scratch that — you do. . . .

ON THE COVER >>>>>

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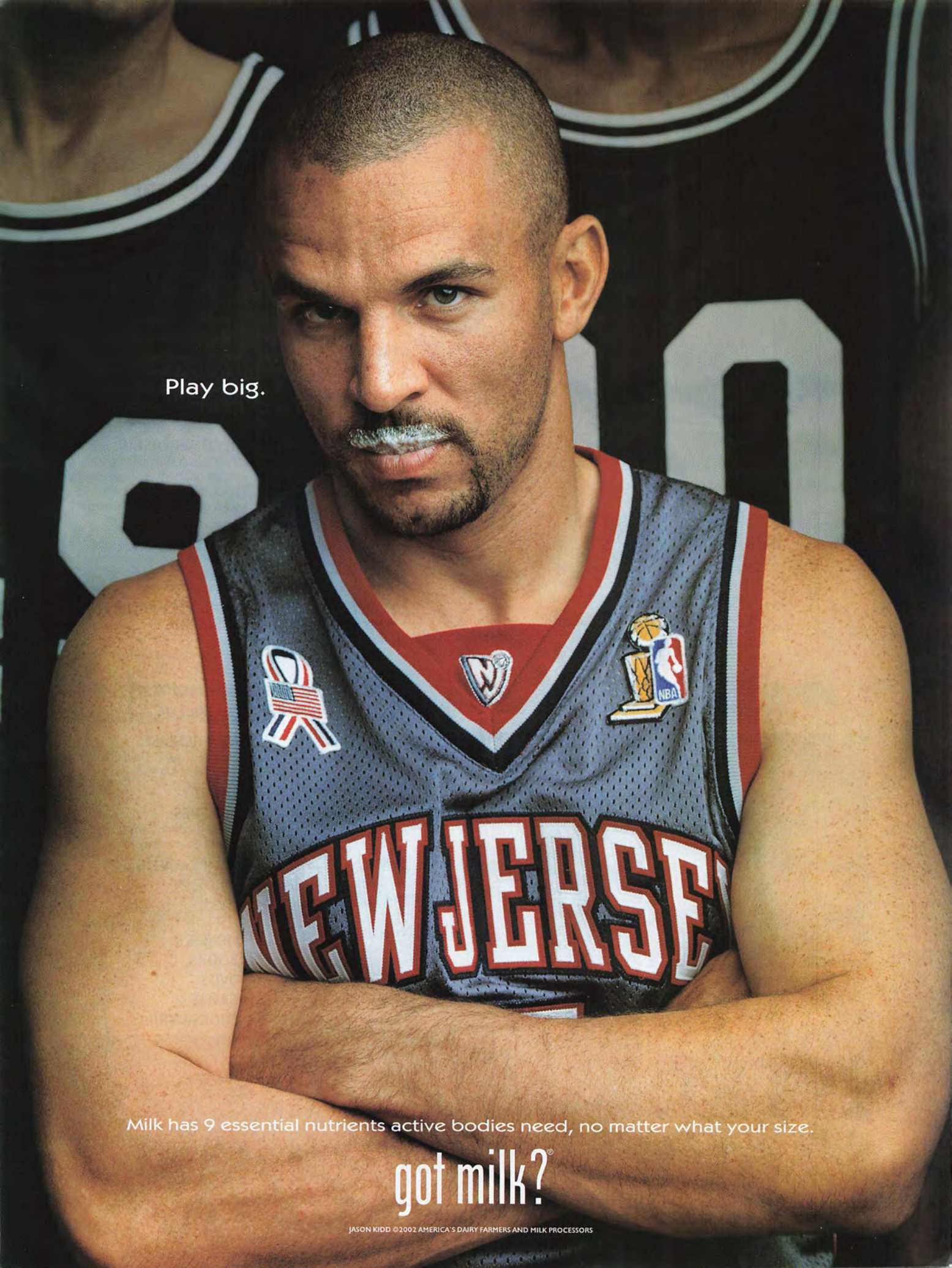
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"I put Cocoa Puffs in the crack of my ass!" TENACIOUS D'S JACK BLACK, p46

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26 **THE NEXT BIG THING!**
Dizzee Rascal; Coheed and Cambria

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Bob Seger had to sneak into the studio at 2:30 A.M. to record his song about the buxom girl who seduced him. "Night Moves," indeed.

46 **DEAR SUPERSTAR**
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56 **ASK BLENDER**
Courtney Love's candy-coated catfight! Neil Young's cocaine-covered booger! And other conundrums cleared up.

138 **WHO DOES WILLA FORD THINK SHE IS?**
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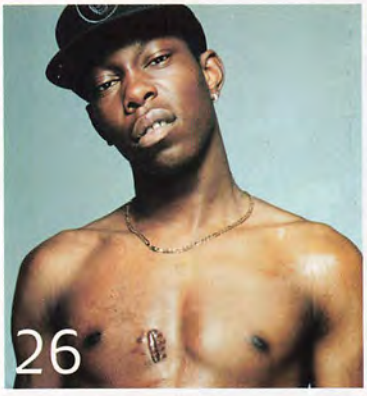
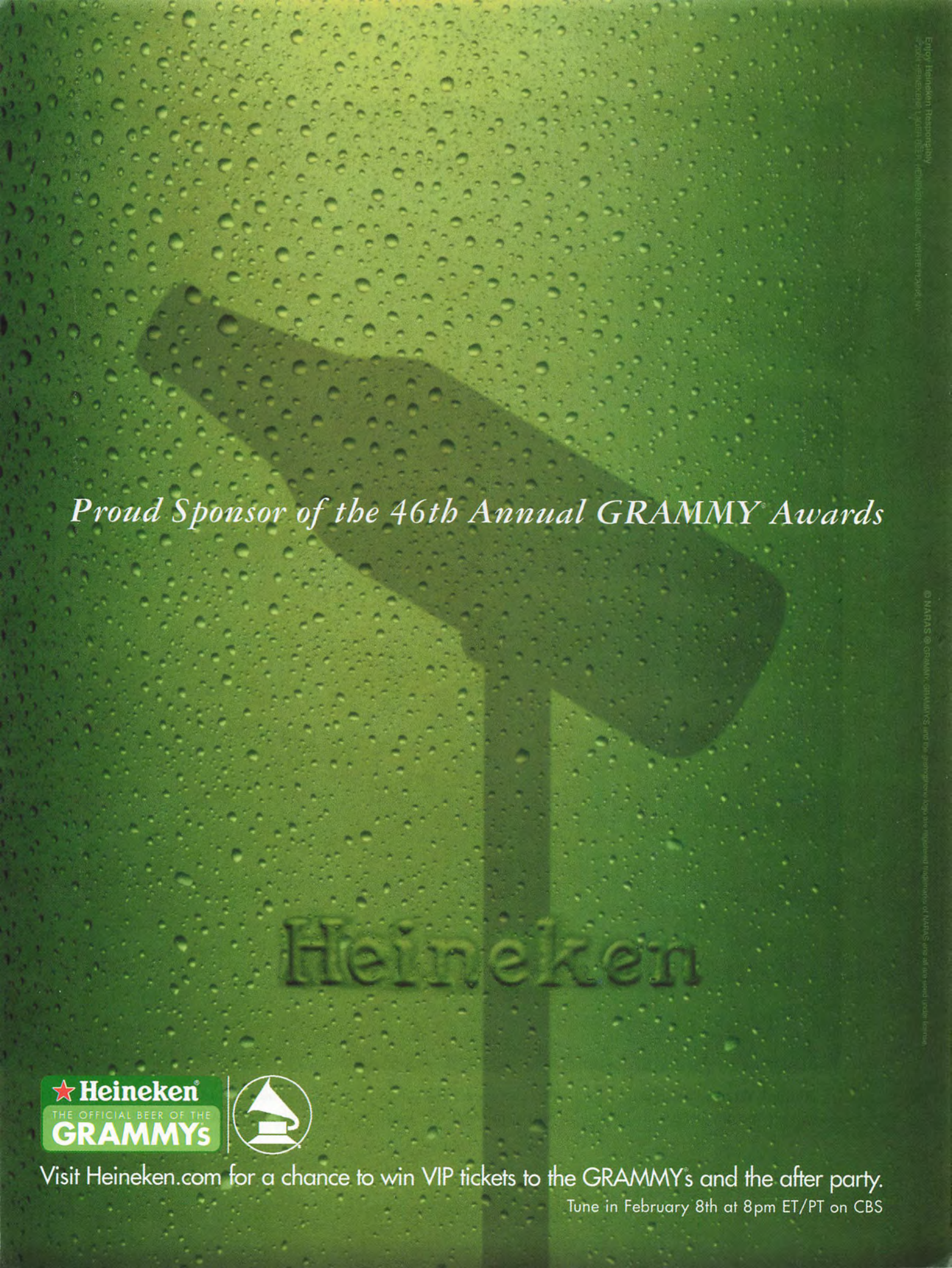


COAT FROM FILTH MART; BRA AND PANTIES BY AGENT PROVOCATEUR AT HENRI BENDEL; SHOES BY BRUNO FRISONI

Justin Stephens (Tenacious D); Michael Lavine (Dizzee Rascal); Lego (Jet; courtesy of J Records (Keys); F. Scott Schafer (Ford). Hair: Creighton; makeup: Scott McMahan at Brush Brush; styling: Basia Zamorska at Aartist Loft.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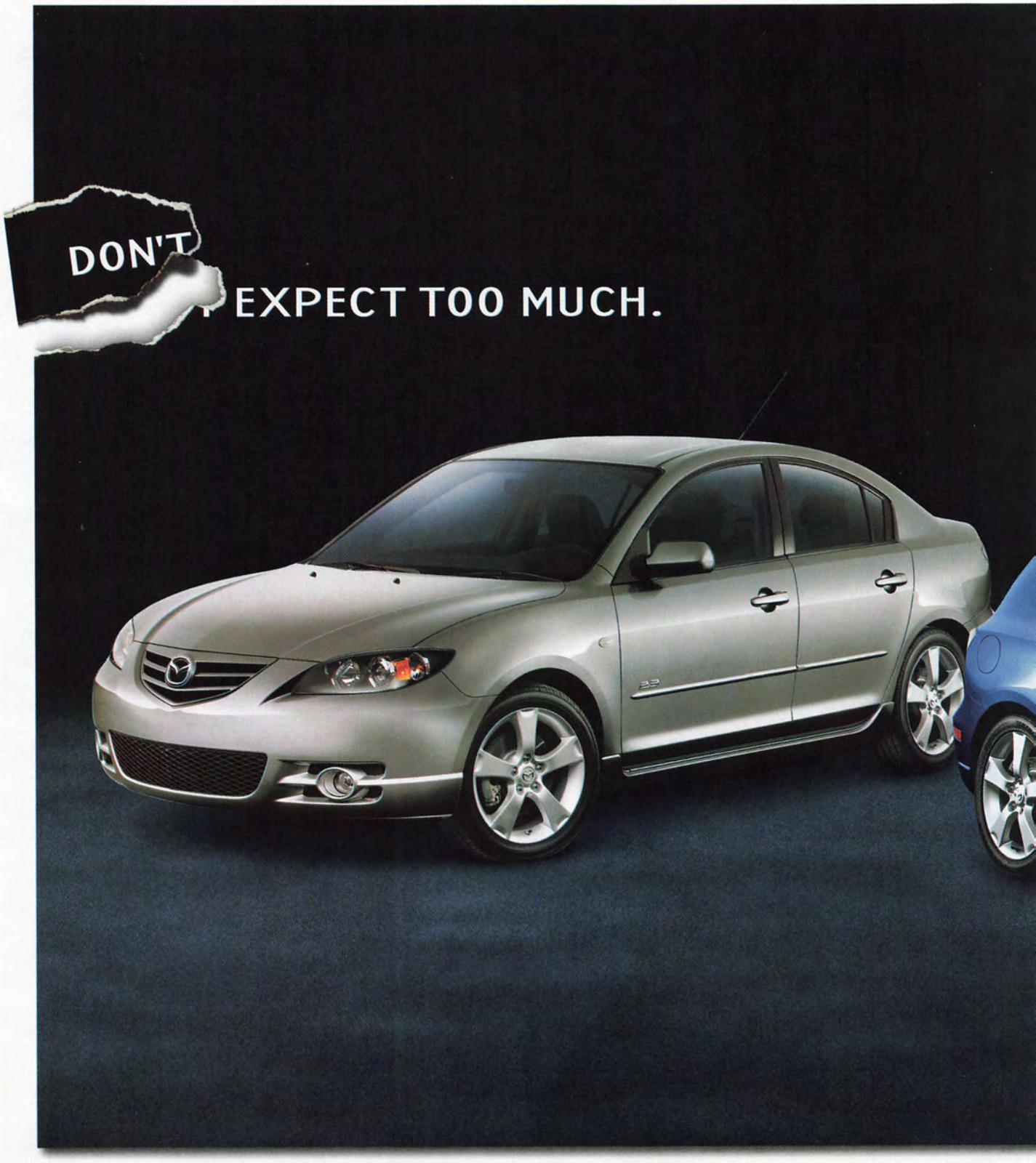

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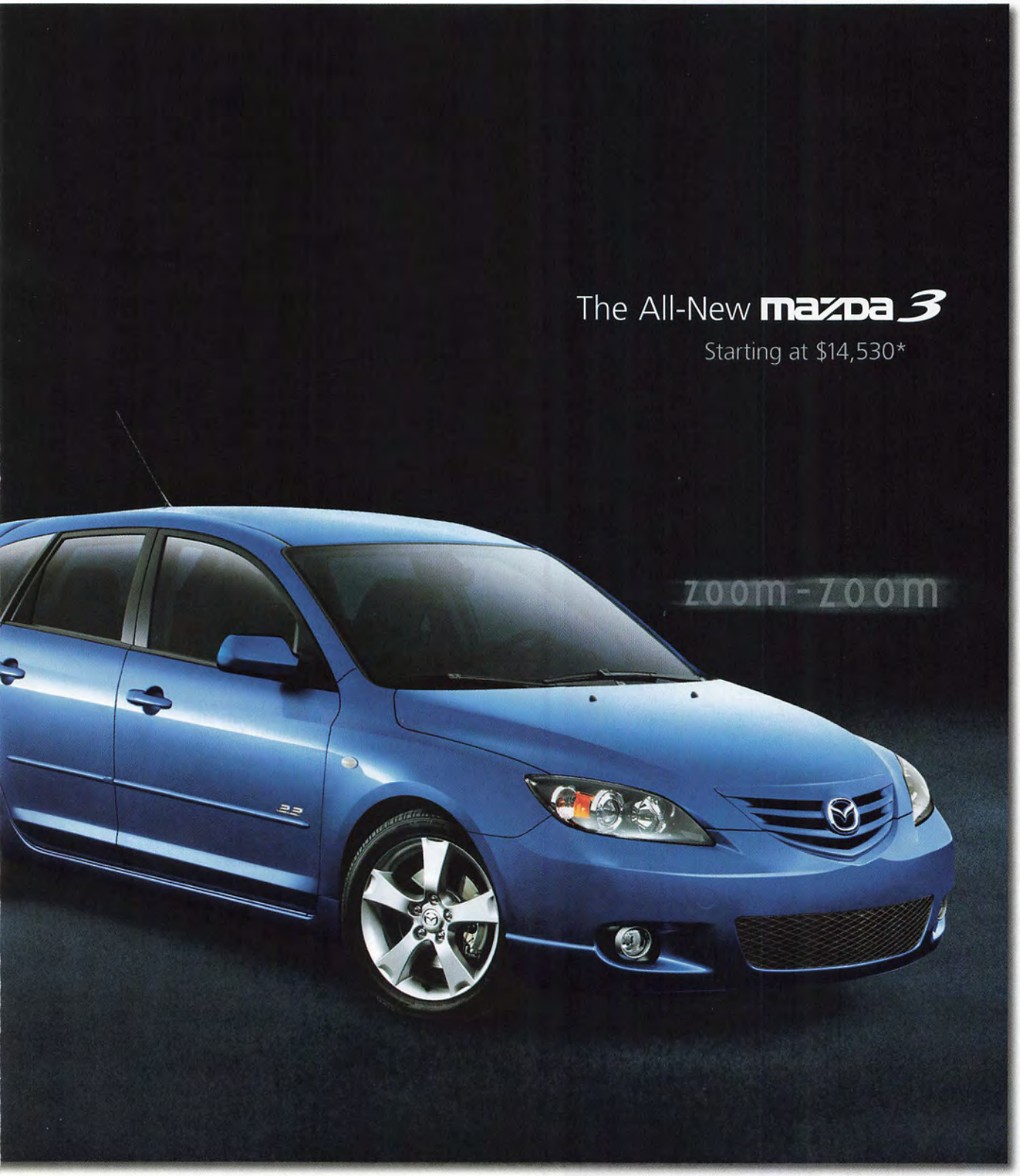

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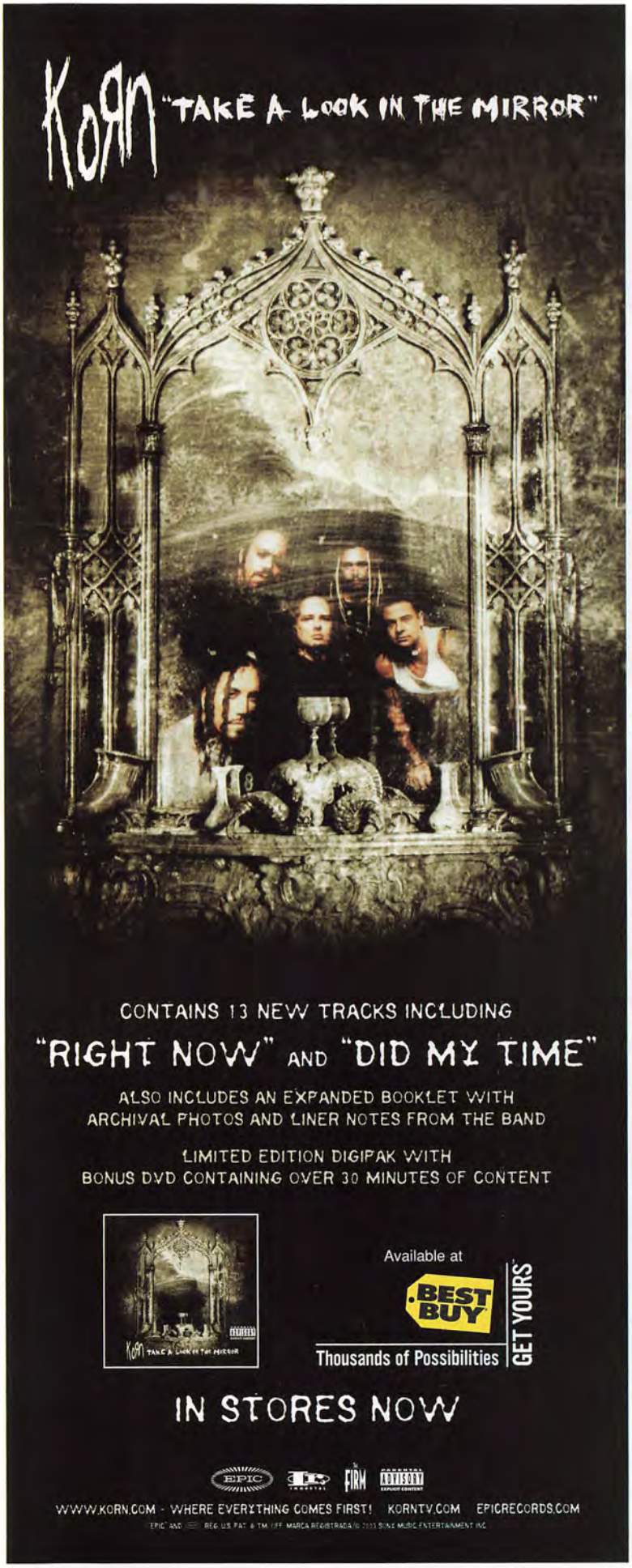
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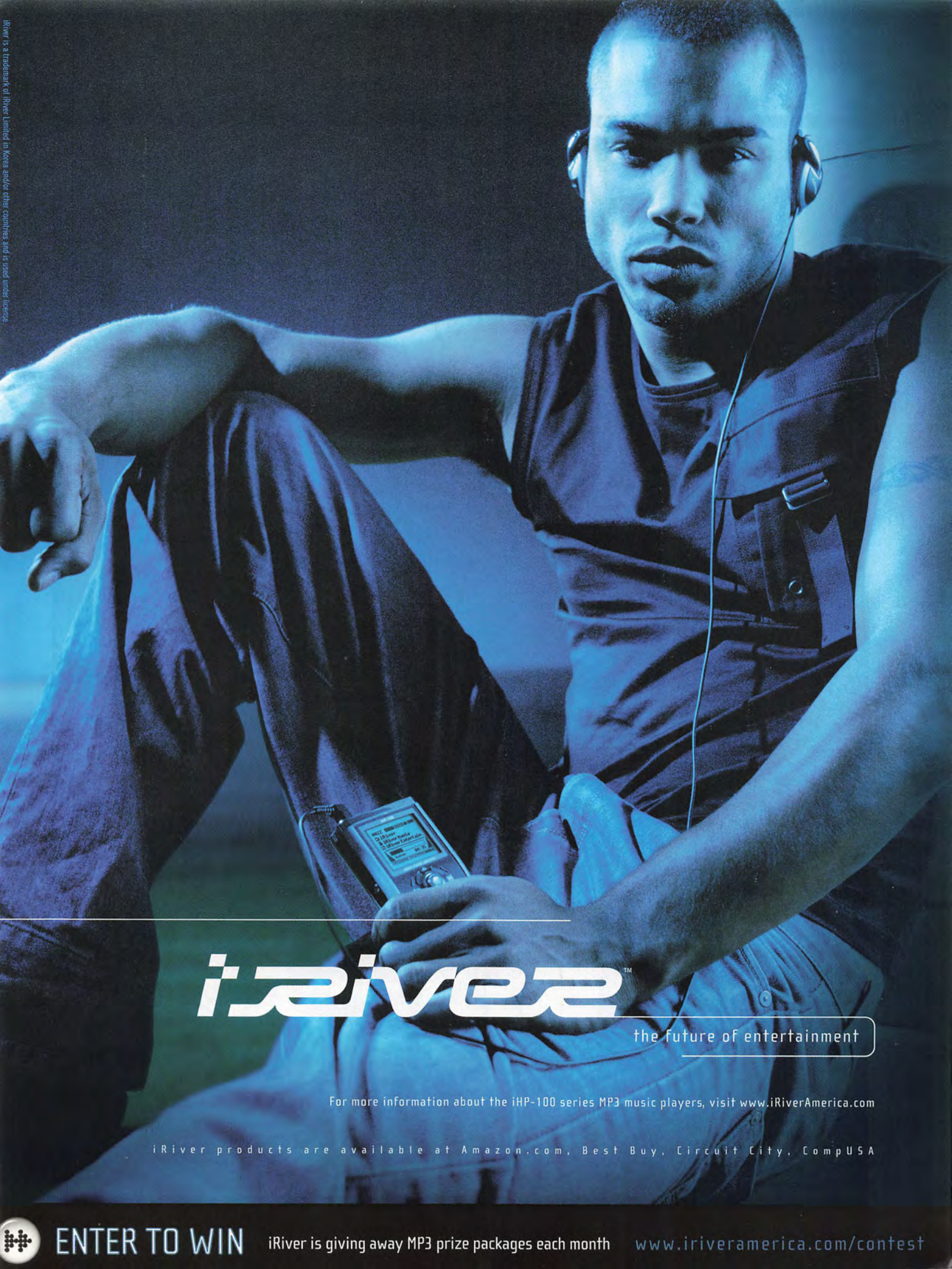
Ian Dickson/Redferns/Retna Ltd. (Thin Lizzy's Phil Lynott photographed at his apartment in London, 1976)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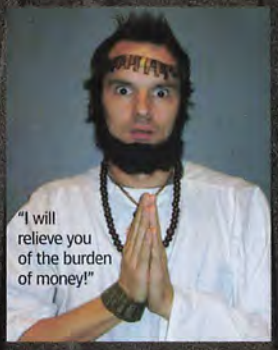

"I will relieve you of the burden of money!"

I CAN REMEMBER clearly when I first experienced what my old pal and fencing partner Madonna would call a "spiritual crisis."

It was a typical workaday Tuesday. After a colossally expensive lunch, I weaved back to my corner office and, as usual, smoked the cured leaves of the JuJu plant while rolling around in a vast pile of $100 bills. Then, shortly before my 4 P.M. "meeting" with the ladies of the Swedish volleyball team — *pow!* — it hit me like a great big spiritual boxing glove with a horseshoe of torment hidden inside. Was the meaningless pursuit of pleasure and cheap kicks all I had to offer the world? Had I become the music-magazine equivalent of Jabba the Hutt?

Luckily, soon afterward, I was introduced to an advanced spiritual path by my guru — and recently appointed financial adviser — the Maharishi Vishy Nishy, who practices a brand of spirituality so advanced I don't understand a word of it.

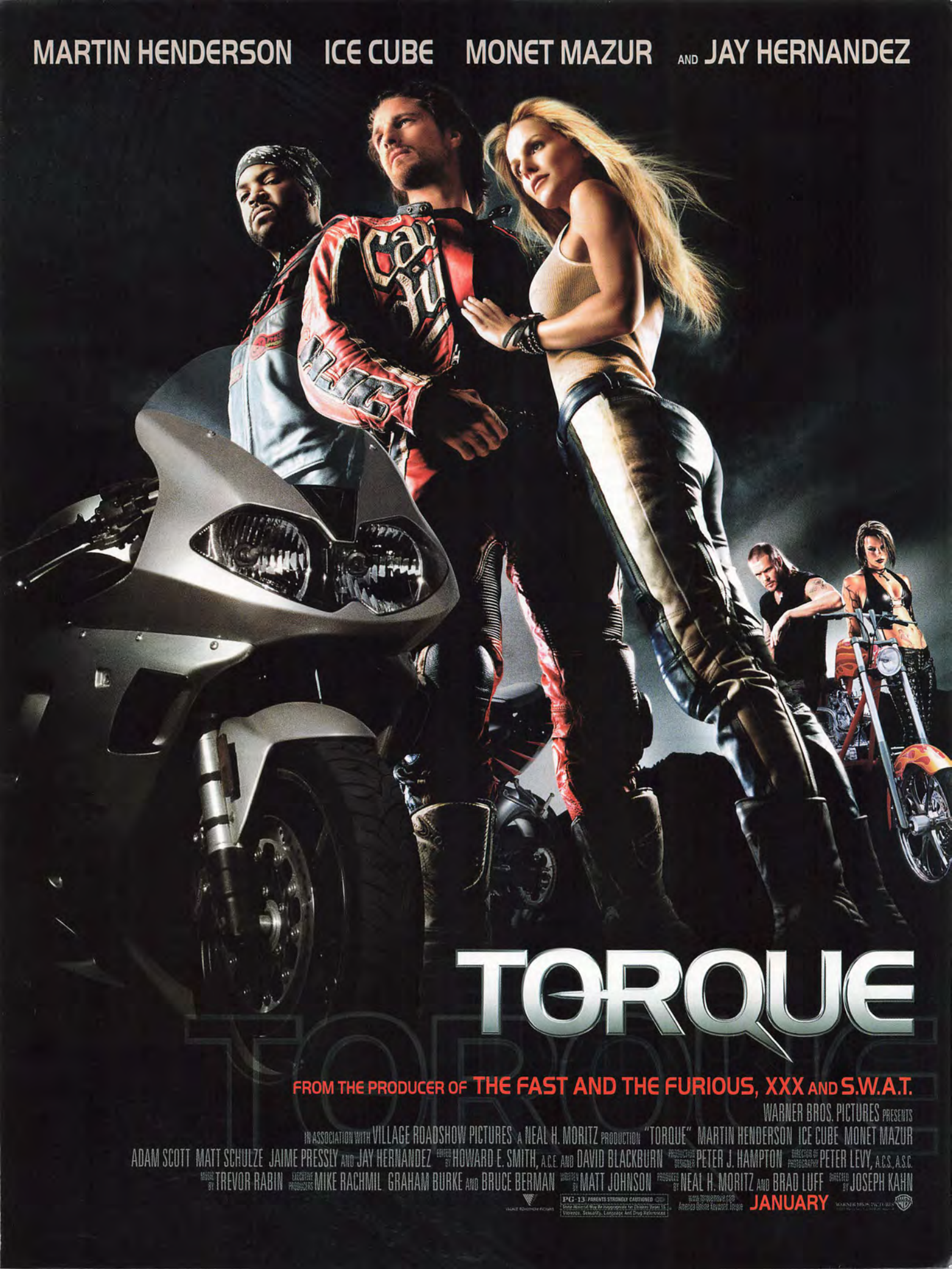
That's why in this issue we have catalogued — alongside lots of other fine articles — rock's top gurus. Not because it is a good idea (although it is), but because Vishy Nishy told me to. And I do everything he says.

Live long and prosper!

ANDY PEMBERTON
EDITOR IN CHIEF

[It's a brand of spirituality so advanced I don't understand a word of it.]

Dmitri Kasterine/Camera Press/Retna Ltd. (The Beatles); TNT Productions (Pemberton)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FAREWELL

The lyric you printed on the spine of your December issue — "You couldn't keep the great unknown from making you mad" — is from Elliott Smith's "A Question Mark." Later in the song, he sings that he has "said my final word." Sadly, he has. Thanks for the tribute.

DALE TARVER, STONY BROOK, NEW YORK

TORTURED SOUL

I hope you will save a special place in your next issue to remember Elliott Smith. While he might not have achieved the recognition of Kurt Cobain or enjoyed the timeless career of Johnny Cash, he did speak to us, the same generation that grew up with Tupac Shakur and Nirvana. We have lost someone great, a tortured soul who was also a terrific musician.

PAUL MARTINEZ, VISALIA, CALIFORNIA

We are happy, if also rather sad, to point you toward our Elliott Smith feature in this issue.

UPSIDE-DOWN LYRIC

The upside-down lyric on the last page of your December issue ("Outside a new day is dawning/Outside suburbia's sprawling") is from Kim Wylde's "Kids in America." Am I clever, or what?

ELIZABETH MARGOSIAN, DUNDALK, MARYLAND

BIT OF A GIVEAWAY

Regarding your feature on Artist of the Year 50 Cent ["America's Favorite Gangsta," December], I can't help feeling that his rap associate Tony Yayo should probably not have named himself after a slang word for cocaine if he intended to continue committing illegal acts (as you mentioned, Yayo is currently serving a yearlong jail sentence for gun possession). I suspect that judges might react more warmly to a guy whose pseudonym was Smith or Jones instead of someone who might as well be called Cokey McSniffs.

JACINDA REYNOLDS, CLINTON, OKLAHOMA

★ Congratulations to the winners of *Blender*'s November Crossword contest, who walk away with a Bose home-entertainment system: Bill and Tammie Kaye of Warren, Ohio. *Yes!*

WIN ME!

LISTEN UP! >>

CALLING ALL *BLENDER* readers: We want to hear from you! Write us a letter. Tell us your deepest thoughts and secret desires. . . . Er, well, maybe just your thoughts, then. If we print your letter in our next issue, we'll send you the amazing SlimX 400. iRiver's premier MP3-CD player features playlist management, built-in FM tuner, skip-free music playback, up to 23 hours of play time and MP3, WMA and ASF format support. *Wow!*

Send your letters to Letters to the Editor, Blender, *1040 Avenue of the Americas, 22nd floor, New York, New York 10018. Or: your2cents@blender.com. Hell, yes!*

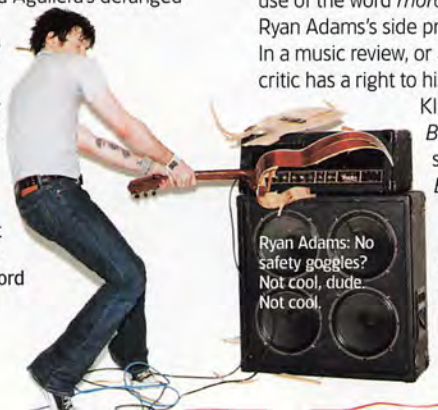
Christina Aguilera: That ribbon is to remind her to buy more ribbon.

IT'S ART!

Christina Aguilera ["The Good, the Bad and the Dirrty," December] says she feels an affinity with Vincent van Gogh. Could this be because he had only one ear — and thus he might have been one of the few people who ever lived who would find Aguilera's deranged caterwauling even remotely tolerable?

JANET RITZA, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Ooh, you bitch! Although we really can't get enough letters that use the word *caterwauling*.



Ryan Adams: No safety goggles? Not cool, dude. Not cool.

BEYONCÉ'S GLISTENING BODY!

Loved your round-up of *Blender*'s best pictures of 2003 ["The Year in Photos," December]. Was that real sweat on Beyoncé's body, or did someone spray her with water? If someone sprayed her, can I apply for that job next time?

BRIAN BURKE, MEDVILLE, ILLINOIS

No need to apply; just take a ticket and get in line. Your number is 17,982,491.

MORONIC COMMENT!

I would like to respond to reader Klisk Fyrerain, who recently wrote [Letters to the Editor, November] objecting to your use of the word *moronic* to describe Ryan Adams's side project, the Finger. In a music review, or any review, the critic has a right to his opinions. So Klisk, don't dis *Blender* for speaking its mind. *Blender* kicks ass.

STEVE TERRAZAS, SAN ANTONIO

He said *ass*. Huuurgh, huuurgh, huuurgh. . . . →

Judson Baker (Aguilera); Kenneth Cappello (Adams)

Dear Ketel One Drinker
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Elizabeth August and Dave Matthews

Shari Susich and Beck

G. Leoni and Mick Jagger

Dustin Nelson and the White Stripes

Juan Flores with the Strokes' Albert Hammond Jr. (left) and Julian Casablancas

Carolyn Bellemare and Pink

DONKEY IN A DRESS!

Thanks for unleashing the Darkness ["What a Beautiful Ass!", December] onto the streets of Manhattan with a donkey! One question: What exactly did you do with the donkey for the hour you spent waiting around for the band to turn up at your office?

AILYNN MARSHALL, DAYTON, OHIO

Well, we certainly didn't put a dress on it, that's for sure. And anyone who says we did is a damn liar!

AN EXCELLENT POINT!

Where have you guys been? It's great to finally have an American music magazine worth buying. Even when I disagree with you, at least you make logical arguments (gasp!) and have well-thought-out reasons (shock!) to underlie your reviews. The music press could learn a thing or two from *Blender*.

JON HUFF, URBANA, ILLINOIS

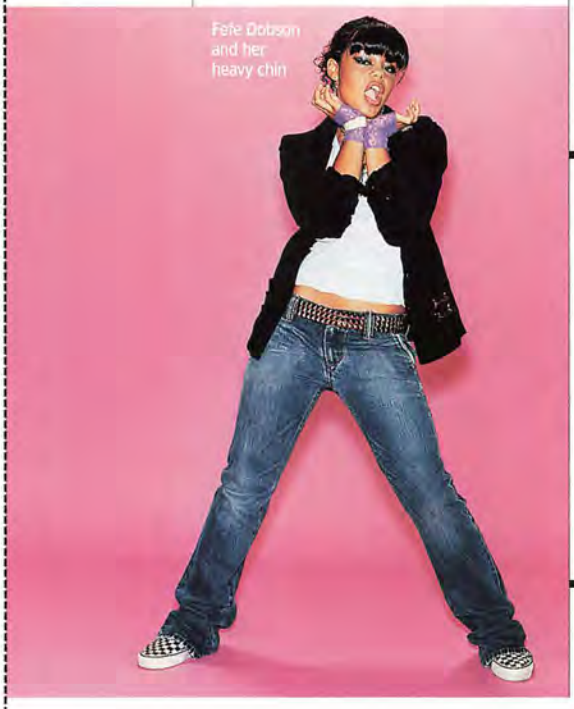
KARAOKE-DOKEY!

Inspired by your story about how Fefe Dobson [The Next Big Thing!, December] got herself a record contract with help from a karaoke machine, I thought I'd have a go at it myself. Did I get signed? No. Did my 9-month-old cocker spaniel take a chunk out of my foot midway through a rendition of "I Will Always Love You"? Yes.

RAMONA JESPERSON, HIXSON, TEXAS

THE STROKES RULE! BLENDER SUCKS!

You have no idea what music really is. First you called the Doors one of the 50 worst bands of all time [October], when it's obvious that they're legends. Now, you don't understand the Strokes. You even misquoted their new song "Reptilia" [New Releases, November]:


Fefe Dobson and her heavy chin

"Please slow me down — I'm going too fast." The real lyric is "Please don't slow me down if I'm going too fast" — which is obviously much different. You guys are idiots. *Blender* should not exist.

PAUL GRIDSEN, MIAMI

Goddamn it, you're right! But only if by "right" you mean "utterly, totally wrong."

I FELL OFF THE TOILET!

I laughed so hard when I read your interview with Triumph the Insult Comic Dog [Who Does Triumph Think He Is?, November], I almost fell off the toilet.

MARTIN SCHWENK, BRIDGEHAMPTON, NEW YORK

AM I CRAZY?

I had never read your magazine before. Then my father decided to give me a subscription, and ever since, I have been a devout *Blender* reader. Every time I'm done reading the current issue, the new one comes in the mail. By far the best thing I've read recently was your interview with Triumph the Insult Comic Dog. I hope you people never stop. I hope that doesn't make me crazy or anything.

ROBERT TORREZ, VIA E-MAIL

No, that doesn't make you crazy. And no, we will never stop. Never! *Never!*

CONTROLLED BY THE DEVIL!

I am a college junior, and I hate your magazine. You are all a bunch of atheists who are apparently controlled

Kenneth Cappello (Dobson)

by the devil! What are you trying to prove? You don't write about anything that makes a lick of sense. I look through your magazine and see junk! You have a few articles worth my time, but mostly I just trash your mag. Write what you want to about me. I probably won't read it anyway.

CASSIE BRITT, PLAINVIEW, TEXAS

DISGUSTING!

I was overjoyed that you printed the photograph of the Distillers playing live at CBGB in New York as part of your year-end photo round-up. Not only did I attend that show, but I actually have the towel that lead singer Brody Dalle is holding in the picture. And I haven't washed it since!

JAYSON LUNDIN, CLIFTON, NEW JERSEY

Thanks for sharing.

ROCK STAR PENIS!

What a crazy night ensued after you guys gave Alien Ant Farm, on tour in Paris, $848 to spend however they wanted ["All We Want Is a Little Love," November]! Those guys in that band are total freaks. I think lead singer Dryden Mitchell has some serious issues. He sounds like a real "touchy-feely" kind of guy — at least when a penis is involved. I saw AAF play in Kansas City, Missouri, in 2001. Mitchell came to the front of the stage holding his hand out. All the fans stuck their hands out, trying to show him some love. My arm stretched the farthest. He reached out to me — only to fake me out and pull his hand back. I thought, "Who do you think you are?" After reading *Blender*'s article, I now know where that hand has been.

JESSI RENNER, LOVELAND, COLORADO

That's right: Paris!

ALIEN ANT FARM HAVE ISSUES

I love the work you put into each issue of *Blender*. What really got to me in your November issue was when, at the end of a wild night in Paris, Alien Ant Farm's Dryden Mitchell told your writer that he would suck his cock if no one else was around. That freaked me out. Mitchell really has issues.

MANDY BOSARGE, URIAH, ALABAMA

CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT BLENDER

Stand aloof from those who would attempt to criticize and mock the works of *Blender*, so that *Blender* may continue to criticize and mock the works of others! More music reviews than a file-sharing addict can possibly download, plus sarcasm served complete with photos. How did I ever live without this magazine? Carry on!

MATHIAS ORTIZ, SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

Dialysis?

The Darkness: Miniature Stonehenge not pictured.

MY BOSS LOVES BLENDER

My boss subscribes to *Blender*, and he puts it on my desk when he's done with it. Little does he know I spend my entire day with *Blender*. Your staff is creative, witty and knows exactly what it's doing. I just wasted an entire Monday with you guys. Thanks! Everyone around the office thinks it's my magazine, but little do they know that our boss has a secret crush on *Blender*.

DANIELLE CARTER, BATTLE CREEK, MICHIGAN

A crush? On us? Oh, gosh, now we're blushing. . . .

BIG IN INDIA

I'm on vacation from India, on my first trip to the U.S. I saw a copy of your September issue at my cousin's place, and I stayed up all night to read it! I'm going to stock up on your past issues before I leave. (I wish *Blender* were sold in India.) You have a new die-hard fan.

RAJIV, PLANO, TEXAS

GOOD NAME FOR A BAND! >>

TE LA PONGO

ELVIS LEYVA, SOUTH GATE, CALIFORNIA

LOOK! NEW CONTEST!

Do you have a good name for a band? Send it to *Blender*! We'll pick the best one we get, and if it's yours, you'll win a sweet CD/MP3 player from iRiver that's just like the one pictured below — how cool is that? So don't hesitate!

Please send your entry to Band Names, Blender, 1040 Avenue of the Americas, 22nd floor, New York, New York 10018. Or e-mail to: bandnames@blender.com. Good luck!

IF POP STARS WERE DOGS...

Daisy, the dog

Kid Rock, the pop star

DOES YOUR DOG RESEMBLE A POP STAR?

If the answer is yes, send a photo with your name, address and who your dog is supposed to be to *Blender* at the address below. If we print yours, you'll win an iRiver iHP-120 MP3 player/FM tuner that holds 600 hours of music. *Yup, yup!*

Send your photos to: If Pop Stars Were Dogs, Blender, 1040 Avenue of the Americas, 22nd floor, New York, New York 10018. Or: your2cents@blender.com.

WIN ME!

Perou (The Darkness); Paul Smith/FeatureFlash/Retna Ltd. (Kid Rock); Lauren Harris (dog)

Len Irish/Corbis Outline

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★ EMINEM'S BUTT ★ JEWEL FLASHES ★ CHRISTINA AGUILERA'S BITCH-FIGHT >>

COURTNEY WATCH SPECIAL!

Courtney Love arrives at a Beverly Hills courthouse, November 12, 11:30 A.M.

Meltdown 2!

Despite losing custody of Frances Bean, **Courtney Love** denies a drug problem and lashes out at those she feels have wronged her

COURTNEY LOVE HAS pleaded not guilty to drug-possession charges at a hearing in Beverly Hills, California. But the troubled star made a series of confused accusations against her ex-boyfriend and others, both on the steps of the courthouse and, apparently, in a befuddled rant (which *Blender* has obtained) attributed to Love, which was briefly posted on her Web site.

Love, 39, filed her not-guilty plea for two separate felony charges for illegal possession of the powerful painkillers Hydrocodone and Oxycodone, which Los Angeles police found in a search on October 2, after Love overdosed on what was believed to be the painkiller OxyContin. (She was also charged with being under the influence of cocaine and opiates, a misdemeanor, for an incident earlier that evening.)

If convicted of all the drug charges, Love faces a maximum penalty of four years and eight months in jail. However, a loophole may prevent her from doing time. California's Proposition 36 — otherwise known as the Substance Abuse and Crime Prevention Act — allows nonviolent drug offenders to receive rehab instead of prison. Love was instructed to meet with probation officials to determine her eligibility for the program.

"What is this? Do I have to live in this weird hell?" ★

During the felony arraignment, Love fidgeted and complained to her attorney that potential future court dates conflicted with a planned trip to London, a video shoot and the Academy Awards.

"What is it we're continuing?" she asked. "Do I have to live in this weird hell?"

Earlier that morning, Love appeared on the steps of the courthouse with Molly, a beagle belonging to her 11-year-old daughter, Frances Bean Cobain. She told reporters that the drugs she used were not illegal, as she had a prescription for them.

Love hosts a photo opportunity with daughter Frances Bean, October 26.

Love outside the courthouse with Molly, Frances Bean's beagle

She identified the medications as the sleep aid Ambien, acetaminophen-codeine and a "hairy old Percocet from, like, years ago." Percocet is a form of Oxycodone, as is OxyContin.

In addition to naming the drugs in question, Love claimed that as much as $40 million of her daughter's money was missing. "Now, I don't even know anyone who has that kind of money — let alone me — but most of it is Frances's," she said.

Ron Fischetti, one of Love's lawyers, later told *Blender* that some money is missing, but not the $40 million she claimed. "Courtney is an artist, not a financial manager. She's right, but her facts may be a tad exaggerated," he said. Love's lawyers have hired forensic accountants to determine what happened to the money.

After her press conference, Love climbed into a waiting Ford Expedition. As it pulled away, she laughed and shouted, "And then I fucked your mom! And I stole your grandma's ring!"

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

WHILE THE COURT will assess Love's suitability for the drug-diversion program, it does not have the power to order her to undergo a psychological evaluation. Sources close to the singer, however, worry about her erratic behavior, her all-nighters and her seeming paranoia.

"If you're speeding at 2,000 miles per hour, you're going to hit a wall," one source said. "I've seen her go without five minutes of sleep for five days straight. It affects your mind, how you think. She's a smart person, but she just thinks and thinks and writes and writes, and if you don't stop, you're going to crash."

Just weeks after she lost custody of her daughter on October 10, a scathing 5,000-word letter, allegedly written by Love, was posted on her Web site, Hole.com. It was almost immediately removed, and references to it on other sites, such as the music-industry gossip site the Velvet Rope, were stricken as well.

The posting made several accusations against Love's ex-boyfriend Jim Barber, who called police on October 2 to report that Love was breaking into his house. It also stated, "I just feel bad, Frances has an idiot for a mother when it comes to men."

Barber responded, in a statement prepared for *Blender*, "I've had a wonderful and always exciting relationship with Courtney for the past four years, so I'm incredibly sad about the way things are now and hope we can resume that relationship in the future."

Meanwhile, Love is fighting to regain custody of Frances Bean, battling the child's paternal grandmother, Wendy O'Connor, Kurt Cobain's mother. Love is also trying to salvage her career via her much-delayed solo debut, *America's Sweetheart*. Its release is set for February 10.

Love was unavailable for comment.

JENNIFER VINEYARD

COURTNEY STILL BEHAVING BADLY >>

It's been a hell of a month for Courtney Love . . .

OCTOBER 21, 2003
Love gets in a fight with Wendy O'Connor at a Los Angeles Juvenile Court hearing concerning the custody of Frances Bean. A judge orders Love to move out of her Beverly Hills mansion but grants her daily visitation rights to see her daughter.

OCTOBER 22
A warrant is issued for Love's arrest for felony possession of illegal substances stemming from her October 2 overdose.

OCTOBER 28
Love turns herself in on felony charges and is released on her own recognizance.

EARLY NOVEMBER
A diatribe containing several bizarre accusations about Love's ex-boyfriend Jim Barber is posted on her Web site. The rant is quickly taken down.

NOVEMBER 12
Appears in court with a dirty shirt and ragged hair to plead not guilty to felony drug-possession charges.

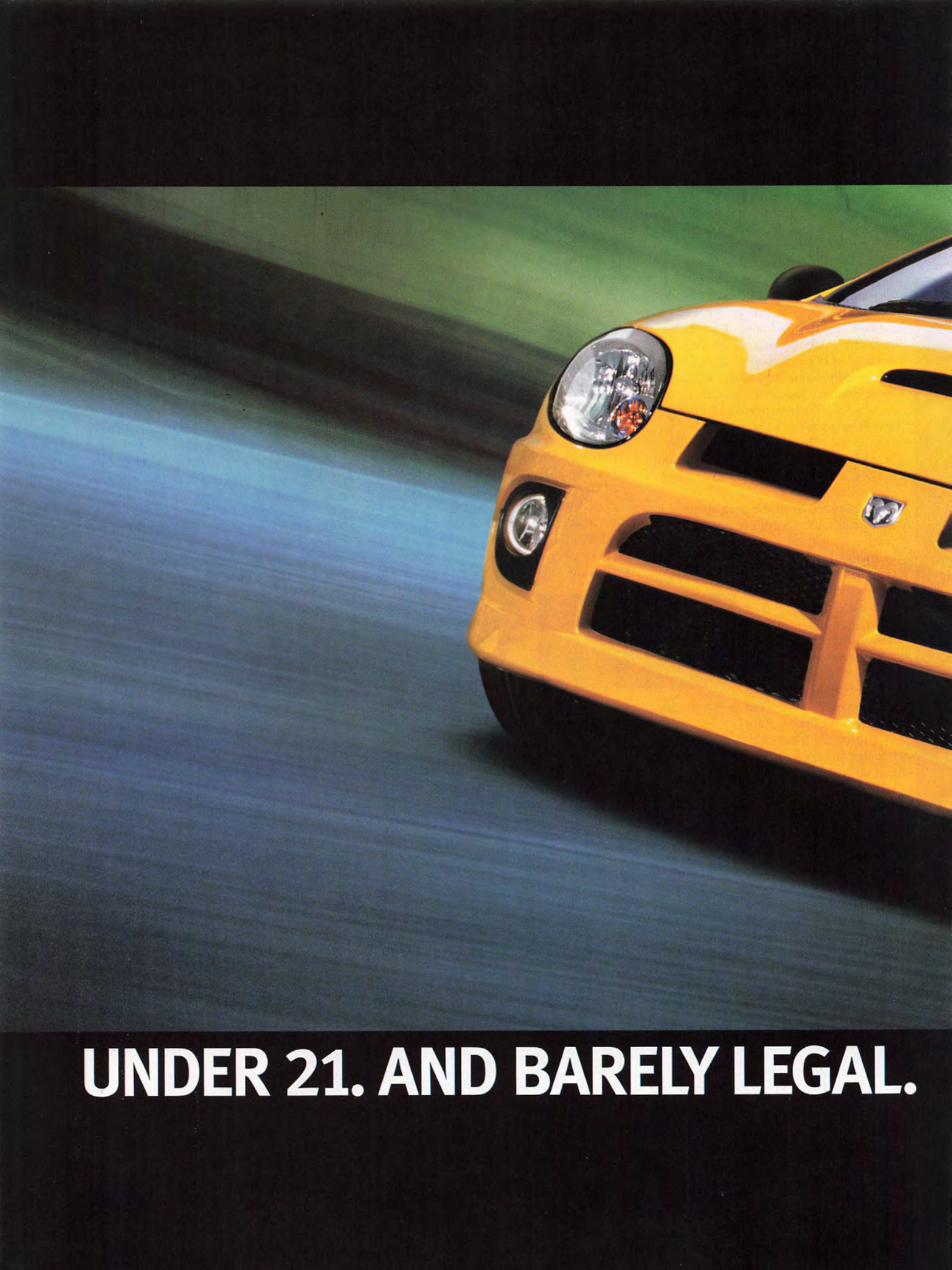
NOVEMBER 14
Her lawyer enters a not-guilty plea for Love's misdemeanor charge of being under the influence of a controlled substance. She reveals that pornographer Larry Flynt is helping her find money she apparently lost.

THAT CRAZY INTERNET POSTING — AT A GLANCE!

The rant claims that . . .

- Love left actor Edward Norton for a Geffen executive to prove that she didn't have to date movie stars
- Child services has been watching Love for 12 weeks
- "Every photograph of Kurt [Cobain's] existence, every piece of artwork Frances ever made" is missing
- An unnamed bank allegedly helped steal from Love and Frances up to $20 million via wire-transfer fraud
- Some of Love's staff was in on the alleged scam, falsifying account statements and filling out cash requests she never saw
- The missing money was allegedly used to help fund pornography ventures

Opposite page: Paul Smith/FeatureFlash/Retna Ltd. (Love, top); Splash News (Love entering court); Ramey Photo (Love, inset); Alphonse Telymonde (still-life). This page, from top: Fame Pictures; Splash News


UNDER 21. AND BARELY LEGAL.

GRAB LIFE BY THE HORNS

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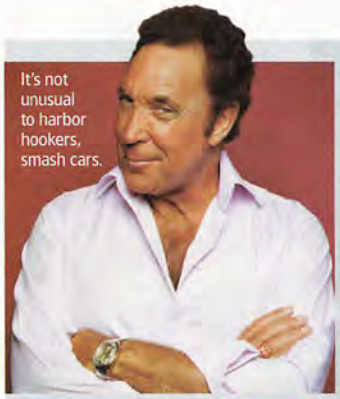


Do You Rock?

Tom Jones

Does the panty-catching, eternally hip Welshman . . . rock?

Best rumor about yourself?
That I'm well-hung. And yeah, there's some truth to it.

Ever trashed a hotel room?
Yes. I smacked a wall with blackjacks, and it fell over! So my band and I went nuts smashing everything in the room.

Largest number of people you've woken up next to in a hotel bed?
Whatever's happened, I sleep alone.

Worst rock & roll injury?
After a show in Belfast, all these females were chasing me. They got on top of me, and one had a finger in my eye! I couldn't see out of it for a week.

Driven a car into a swimming pool?
No, but while speeding through London drunk, I drove into a barrier. The policeman, who was Welsh, said, "Get out of here. I smell booze on you!"

Worst tour horror story?
Once, I was in a bathroom stall with my trousers around my ankles. A girl jumped over the door and started kissing and grabbing me! You can't be sexy when you're taking a dump.

Thought about marrying a cousin?
No, but I've thought about other things. I've got some pretty cousins.

Harbored a fugitive?
When I first went to London, my band and I lived in a neighborhood with a lot of hookers. When the police went after them, we'd hide them in our flat. They, of course, had to repay us.

Most expensive item of clothing?
A full-length white mink coat from the '70s. I dressed like rappers before rap.

Ever get lucky on an airplane?
Yes, but I can't go into detail — I'm a married man. *DAVE HILL*

VERDICT:
HOOKER FUGITIVES? DRUNK DRIVING? MILE-HIGH SEX? TOM JONES ROCKS HARD!

→ TOM JONES'S NEW ALBUM, *RELOADED GREATEST HITS* (UTV), IS OUT NOW.

News Roundup!

VON BONDIES singer Jason Stollsteimer has hit back at claims by the White Stripes' **JACK WHITE** that he is a "sore thumb" in the Detroit garage-rock scene and is jealous of his former friends' success. Stollsteimer says he and White remain friends, but that "everyone is really busy."

ROD STEWART has lashed out at his superstar friends, saying that **ELTON JOHN** — whom he calls "Sharon" — wears a toupee and "could lose a bit of timber." He also laid into **STING**, calling him "Mr. Serious who helps the Indians."

A recent **AEROSMITH** concert in Las Vegas featured an intermission during which Steven Tyler's daughter Mia and her betrothed, **PAPA ROACH** drummer Dave Buckner, were married onstage. Following the service, the band broke into "Walk This Way."

WORD!

"I wouldn't want my kid, at 21, to be dressing like that."

BRITNEY SPEARS COMMENTS ON HER OWN PHOTOS

Flashy!

Jewel reveals what's under her top to a consenting adult

>> DURING A RECENT taping of MTV's hit show *Total Request Live*, a hidden camera caught pop star Jewel in a sexy, candid moment with her boyfriend, rodeo champion Ty Murray.

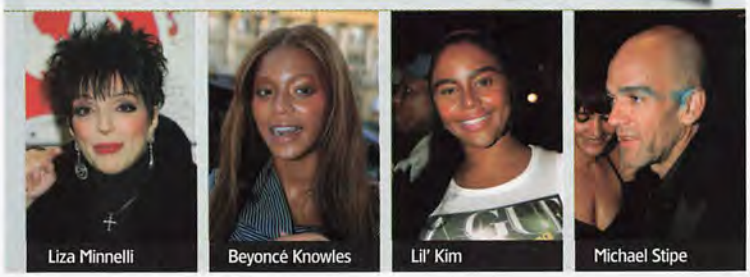
After the couple ventured into a photo booth on the set of the show, Jewel lifted her shirt and bra, and Murray nuzzled on her bare breast.

Jewel insisted that the indiscretion "wasn't gross" and that there was "no Pamela Lee happening."

"We're young, in love and didn't know there were cameras. Oh, well!" she told *Blender*. *JON REGARDIE*

Pop Star Must-Have
WEIRD MAKEUP!

These days, it's not enough to wear makeup. Pop stars must sport *strange* face paint . . .



RankinESP (Jones), courtesy of http://www.scottornot.com/jewelrl.jpg (Jewel and Murray); Joseph Marzullo/Retna Ltd. (Boy George); Bauer-Griffin.com (Stipe); Johnny Nunez/Wirelmage.com (Lil' Kim); SplashNews.com (Knowles); Joseph Marzullo (Minnelli); Gary French (illustration)

RATCHET & CLANK GOING COMMANDO

They're back. And they're itching for action. With tons of planets to conquer in a whole new gigantic galaxy, you better believe Ratchet & Clank are gonna sink their teeth into some destruction. Ummm, destruction. With weapon upgrades, mods, armor and the ability for Ratchet to get stronger and smarter as the game goes on, this could get uglier than the Grandmas In Bikinis Calendar after-party. Speaking of parties, there's also hoverbike racing, space combat and gladiator arenas. As far as weapons and gadgets go, Ratchet & Clank are stacked with 50 new ones, along with unlockable upgrades, so by the end of the journey, you'll go through more weapons and gadgets than a hungry fat man will go through chicken wings at lunch. Lock and load, baby, lock and load.

YES, YES, YES, YES, YES, YES, YES, AND HELL YEAH.

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Mild Violence

PlayStation.2

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The Next Big Thing!

DIZZEE RASCAL

Stabbed five times last year, this London rapper is keeping cool

BY NICK DUERDEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL LAVINE

>> A PAIR OF feline eyes peek cautiously from beneath the brim of a baseball cap, looking completely bewildered. A lot has happened to Dizzee Rascal since the U.K. release of the London-born rapper's debut, *Boy in da Corner:* He has been hailed as England's hottest new star, won the prestigious Mercury Music Prize and, in July, was stabbed five times in a murder attempt.

"I could've died, but I'm a survivor," says the 19-year-old. Rascal was attacked while vacationing in Cyprus. The perpetrators, it has been alleged, were associates of British garage collective So Solid Crew, with whom Rascal has had a long-running feud.

"I'm not here to show people how gangsta I am," he says. "My music ain't all violence. It's about love, about surviving your surroundings, about peace."

Brought up by his mother in one of London's poorer neighborhoods, Rascal, born Dylan Mills, dabbled in crime and was expelled from four schools before tapping into his musical potential. By the time his album came out last summer, his reputation preceded him.

Boy in da Corner is a pile-driving record revolving around furious bass frequencies, minimalist beats and Rascal's nervy, twitching delivery. His lyrics deal with the bleak life on the streets: guns, drugs, underage pregnancy, suicide contemplation. Like Tricky at his most abrasive, it's not an easy listen, but it is riveting.

"Yeah, my album's vulnerable in places, but I'm not afraid to show. America will get where I'm coming from," he predicts. "Especially in the South. Real recognizes real."

Rascal will donate half of his $30,000 Mercury Prize to five underprivileged youth clubs: "It's best to give it back." He reaches for his orange juice. "I'm the next generation. That's what I am." [BLENDER]

>>> OUT NOW
BOY IN DA CORNER *XL/MATADOR*

[Pile-driving rap with furious bass and minimalist beats.]

ALL ABOUT ME!

FULL GIVEN NAME
Dylan Mills

BIRTHDATE
September 18, 1984

WOULD DIE TO MEET
"God."

FIRST BIG PURCHASE AFTER RECORD DEAL
"Lots of Nike sneakers."

FAVORITE SONG RIGHT NOW
"The Neptunes featuring Super Cat, 'The Don of Dons.' "

MOST DIVA-LIKE DEMAND
"I ain't no diva, but weed and Hennessy are a must for shows."

JEANS BY **LEVI'S**; SWEATSHIRT BY **NIKE**

Grooming: Andie Markos-Byrne

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"Is that my spider sense tingling, or are you tickling my ass?"

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AND OTHER LATE-BREAKING DEVELOPMENTS

Arnold hiring a private investigator	is the new	Arnold investigating women's privates
Girls playing with scantily clad hip-hop dolls	are the new	Hip-hop artists playing with scantily clad girls
Downloading Paris and Rick's homemade sex tape	is the new	Downloading Pam and Tommy's homemade sex tape
Montel Williams, busted for dope props in the airport	is the new	Montel Williams, busting balls in the television studio
Celebrities working at sweatshops	are the new	Celebrities allegedly using workers at sweatshops
Martha going head-to-head with the U.S. government	is the new	Martha going head-to-head with a cabbage
Government giving U.S. currency a makeover	is the new	Government giving U.S. economy a makeover
Xtina	is the new	Cher

News Roundup!

In his new autobiography, **STING** has revealed that he was drawn to music after discovering his mother having an affair with a milkman. The traumatic incident occurred one morning when he woke up early for school and was blocked from entering his mother's bedroom.

7-Eleven has agreed to stock **NELLY**'s new energy drink, Pimp Juice, despite protests from activist groups that the product creates a negative image of African-Americans, the beverage's target market. "You can't underestimate the bottom line here," said 7-Eleven CEO Jim Keyes.

Within 24 hours of a search of **MICHAEL JACKSON**'s Neverland ranch, a warrant was issued for the superstar's arrest on suspicion of child molestation. The Santa Barbara, California, sheriff's office was acting on accusations made by a 12-year-old boy.

WORD!

"It's like going through a war zone just trying to get to your seat."

R. KELLY, ON HIS OVERZEALOUS FEMALE FANS

Xtina: "Suck on this, Osbourne!"

Kelly Osbourne: "You wish!"

Pink: "Whatever!"

Catfight!

Kelly Osbourne and Pink take on Xtina. *Mrowwrrr!*

>> AFTER CALLING Christina Aguilera a "cow" and a "sad, sorry person" during the MTV Europe Music Awards, Kelly Osbourne faces a lifetime ban from future MTV ceremonies. Network executives reportedly confronted her afterward, calling her outburst "childish and unnecessary."

Osbourne, however, isn't the only one who has it out for Aguilera. Pink refused to cohost the European bash with the *Stripped* star, calling her a "big diva." "I wouldn't do it with her, because that would take the fun out of it," Pink explained.

Aguilera had earlier taken a jab at Pink's sartorial style, accusing her of copycatting: "When has Pink not been copying me? In her fashion it's always like, 'Gosh, I just wore that last week.' " *NOEL BODDIE*

Weird Band Alert!

ELVIS CHICKEN

He's a grown man with a rubber chicken head who plays TV themes!

The Artist Formerly Known as Elvis Cock

WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?
Tom Brunner, a 42-year-old from Ocean City, Maryland, who builds miniature golf courses, wears a chicken head onstage while performing television-show theme songs such as "Hawaii 5-0" on a Suzuki Q-Chord synth-guitar. Occasionally, he squawks.

WHY A CHICKEN?
He admires chickens. "I used to play in a band that had a chicken," he says. "We dyed it green and had it running around onstage."

OK, BUT WHY "ELVIS CHICKEN"?
"I just liked the name," he says with a shrug.

IS IT HARD TO PERFORM IN A RUBBER CHICKEN HEAD?
"That's something I'm still working on," he says. "I do a 40-minute set, and after about 25 minutes it starts to get really hot and heavy in there."

DOES HE DO ANYTHING ELSE?
Yes: somersaults. "It's unexpected," Brunner says. "It catches attention." *Squawwk!* *STEVE LOWE*

Splash News (Jackson); Getty Images (Aguilera at top); Dave Hogan/Getty Images (Osbourne, Aguilera at bottom); Mark Mainz/Getty Images (Pink); courtesy of Elvis Chicken (Elvis Chicken); Corbis (Cher); Lawrence Lucier/FilmMagic.com (P. Diddy); Nick Wall/Wirelmage.com (Driver); Sarah Cullen (doll); Gary French (illustration)

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How can you have music video awards when you don't have music videos?

Excuse us for invading your lives with such a harsh thought. For that, here is a picture of a RAINBOW.

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The Next Big Thing!

Coheed and Cambria, from left: Claudio Sanchez, Michael Todd, Josh Eppard, Travis Stever

[They sound like '70s prog-rock giants Rush with comical sci-fi lines.]

COHEED AND CAMBRIA

A concept quartet sings about two imaginary characters. Geeky!

BY NICK DUERDEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN STEPHENS

>> FORMED FOUR YEARS ago in upstate New York by afro'd frontman Claudio Sanchez, Coheed and Cambria are a concept band. Every song tells the continuing, highly elaborate story of the mythical characters Coheed and Cambria, who are husband and wife.

When the songs fail to tell their story, the band — Sanchez, bassist Michael Todd, guitarist Travis Stever and drummer Josh Eppard, all between 23 and 25 years old — hopes the accompanying comic book, to be published this spring, will fill in the blanks.

"Basically," Sanchez begins, sprawled in his Arizona hotel room during the band's current U.S. tour, "I've always loved comic books, horror and science fiction. I never thought my personal life was all that interesting to put into song." He grins sheepishly. "So I created Coheed and Cambria, and we follow their lives, their adventures and their untimely deaths."

The band's 2002 cult debut, *The Second Stage Turbine Blade,* follows that story line. Their latest album, *In Keeping Secrets of Silent Earth: 3,* tells the tale of the ill-fated lovers' son Claudio, who goes into hiding from their killers. Unsurprisingly, the band's fan base is made up of young male Trekkies.

"You don't have to care about the concept in order to dig the music," Sanchez says. "If you just want to dig the music, then go right ahead."

Coheed and Cambria sound like legendary '70s prog-rock giants Rush, with comical sci-fi lines such as "Let this colony know in the name of the dead we're coming," from the snappily titled track "The Velourium Camper III."

"I do have a girlfriend," Sanchez says, a little defensively. He laughs and shakes his enormous afro, of which he is inordinately proud. "Having big hair is a real rock statement, isn't it? I plan to grow it so big that it reaches right down to my ass." He gives a Dr. Evil cackle. "Man, my girlfriend will be so pissed!"

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the geekiest band that ever lived! [BLENDER]

ALL ABOUT US!

OBSESSION
"Mexican food."

FAVORITE SONG BY ANY ARTIST RIGHT NOW
"The Darkness, 'Love Is Only a Feeling.' "

FAVORITE MOVIE ON THE TOUR BUS
"*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2.*"

WOULD DIE TO MEET
"Ernest Hemingway."

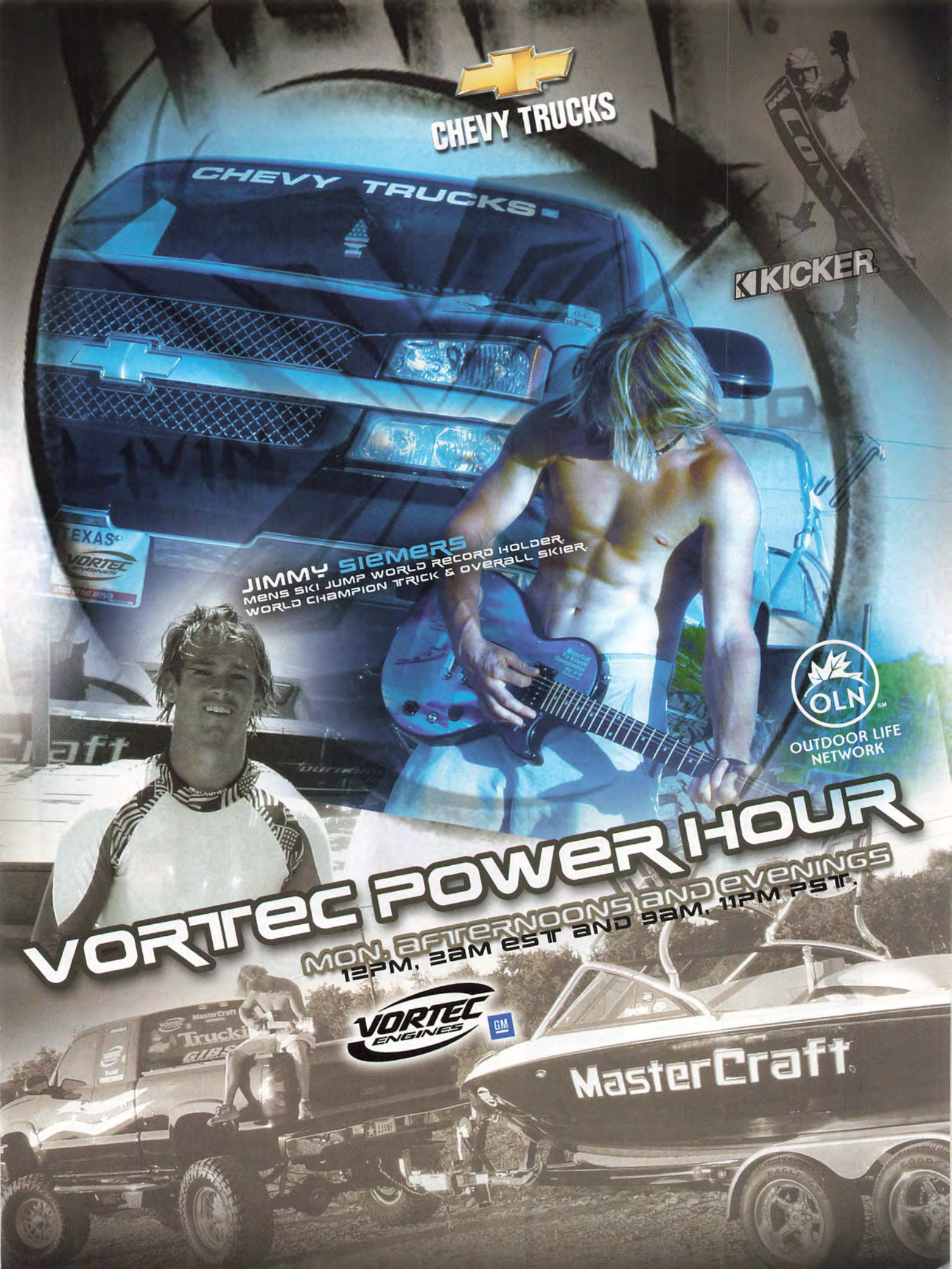
MOST DIVA-LIKE DEMAND
"Clean socks."

FREQUENT BUT INACCURATE BAND COMPARISON
"Rush."

BRITNEY OR CHRISTINA
"Neither, thank you."

>>> OUT NOW IN KEEPING SECRETS OF SILENT EARTH: 3 *EQUAL VISION*

Prop styling: John Mihaiuser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CHEVY TRUCKS
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WORLD CHAMPION TRICK & OVERALL SKIER.
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What's in Your Bag? ★

Alison Goldfrapp, vinyl nymph mite

GOLDFRAPP

Rockit Scientist Records, 43 Carmine Street, New York

CABARET VOLTAIRE
RADIATION
"Always interesting. Their later stuff predated house by a few years. 'Do the Mussolini (Head Kick)' and 'Nag Nag Nag' still sound fantastic."

NICO
DESERTSHORE
"I love her sultry voice and sleepy music, its dark, weird simplicity. Seeing this album reminded me that I no longer owned it, so I decided to buy it again."

THE RUNAWAYS
THE RUNAWAYS
"I had a crush on Joan Jett. I usually finish my DJ set with 'I Love Rock and Roll.' It's kitschy but brilliant. This is fantastic, has a great sleeve and is very rare."

DUSTY SPRINGFIELD
DUSTY IN MEMPHIS
"Her sensuality struck me as a child. She was a character. Must've been hard to be the woman she was." *SARAH WILSON*

→ GOLDFRAPP'S NEW ALBUM, *BLACK CHERRY* (MUTE), IS OUT NOW.

News Roundup!

Motown star **SMOKEY ROBINSON** narrowly escaped October's wildfires in Southern California after remaining in his house while flames surrounded the property. "The fire was all around me," he said.

Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan has met with **JA RULE** and implored him to end his battle with **50 CENT**. After the meeting, Ja claimed he now sees "the bigger picture." 50 Cent has thus far refused to meet with Farrakhan.

SHIRLEY MANSON and **MARILYN MANSON** are discussing possibly performing a duet. "We feel it would be a riot," the Garbage singer said.

BRYAN ADAMS had an affair with **PRINCESS DIANA** in 1996, according to the singer's ex-girlfriend Cecilie Thomsen. Adams claims the two were simply "very good friends."

WORD!

"If that bitch mentions my name once, I'm not going onstage — and I'm not kidding."

PINK, AT THE MTV EUROPE AWARDS, REFERRING TO THE SHOW'S HOST, CHRISTINA AGUILERA

This is a photo of Eminem's arse.

Eminem, with new pal Julia Piper, doing "the goldfish".

Mooning!

Eminem just can't keep his pants on

>> *BLENDER* HAS discovered a photo of Eminem's bare ass, taken while the rapper was on a London mooning spree this summer.

"He kept drinking and doing drugs," said 29-year-old fitness instructor Julia Piper, a witness to the rapper's alleged bender at the London nightclub Fabric. "He was so hyper and kept jumping up on the speakers and entertaining us with little songs!"

Piper also claimed that later on, Eminem and his entourage invited her to the Metropolitan Hotel, where he began exposing his backside to passersby in the lobby. "He had a great ass and kept showing it to us," Piper says. "I didn't mind. Another trick was when he held his breath, as if he was underwater, and looked like a goldfish."

Eminem could not be reached for comment. *NOEL BODDIE*

Emily Wilson (Goldfrapp, 5); Splash News (Eminem, 2); Gary French (illustration)

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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Mild Language, Suggestive Themes

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Kim Mathers, very "awake" when arrested in June

TAGGED!

Eminem's fugitive ex-wife to wear an electronic monitor

EMINEM'S EX-WIFE has been forced to wear an electronic tag on her leg for 50 days following two court no-shows in her cocaine-possession case.

Kimberly Mathers, 28, who earlier pleaded not guilty, failed to appear in Michigan's Macomb County Court on October 20 and again the following day. Judge Edward Servitto then issued an arrest warrant. When Mathers showed up on October 23, the judge placed her under "electronic house arrest," meaning she is not allowed to leave home (except for counseling sessions) until her next court date.

Prosecutors allege two bags containing "less than 25 grams" of a "mixture containing cocaine" were found in Mathers's Cadillac Escalade when she was stopped for a traffic infraction in June. The maximum sentence is four years in prison.

Strangely, a week earlier in the same court — also the scene of the Matherses' 2001 divorce — Eminem won a slander case brought by a grade-school classmate. The judge in that case was Deborah Servitto, the ex-wife of the judge who tagged Kim.

Ms. Servitto, who delivered her verdict as a rap, has been offered television opportunities. *PHIL SUTCLIFFE*

Tell Us a Joke!

TOBY KEITH

"What's the difference between a twosome and a threesome? In a twosome, only one girl gets disappointed."

AS TOLD TO WILLIE B. HARDIGAN

News Roundup!

P. DIDDY's gentleman butler, Farnsworth Bentley, is launching a signature line of umbrellas. The luxury items will sell for around $150.

Ex-Kiss guitarist **BRUCE KULICK** — Ace Frehley's replacement from 1985 to 1995 — was recently shot in the thigh by a random assailant near the Rainbow Bar and Grill in Hollywood. Kulick had just left a gig by former Mötley Crüe singer Vince Neil.

SLIPKNOT frontman Corey Taylor says the masked metallers' next album will offer a new lyrical direction: "The stuff I've been writing is very philosophical."

KYLIE MINOGUE has decided to keep her backside covered in her forthcoming videos. "I'm a 35-year-old woman," she explained.

WORD!

"There needs to be a part of the relationship that you keep private."

MADONNA, ON JENNIFER LOPEZ AND BEN AFFLECK'S ROMANCE

★ Where Are They Now? ★

Life After Rock

The Marshall Tucker Band marauded for months in search of the missing hat.

David "Ace" Allen

OF THE MARSHALL TUCKER BAND

THEN! DRUMMER, 1985–1992

NOW! REAL-ESTATE COMPANY OWNER, SPARTANBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA

>> "BEING IN THE Marshall Tucker Band was wonderful; we were one of the pioneering bands of Southern rock & roll. In New York we'd play rock venues; in Dallas we'd play country venues.

"Of course there were parties. There's a time and place for everything, and there was definitely a time and place for that. But we were a hard-working band. My last year, we did 250 live shows. One time in 1990, we did four shows in 24 hours in four states.

"A highlight was playing the Pontiac Silverdome [near Detroit] in 1989 for the This Country's Rocking show. It was a big deal, because it was a three-day concert, and it was pay-per-view featuring everybody from Ted Nugent to Lynyrd Skynyrd.

"When my third wife and I had a baby in 1989, I felt like I had to grab ahold of some kind of reality.

"One of my wife's best friends was in real estate. She said, 'You know so many people around the area. You could probably do pretty well.' So in 1996, I got my license.

"Three years later, a partner and I started Allen McCall GMAC Real Estate. Now we have 17 real-estate agents working for us, and we just opened a mortgage company.

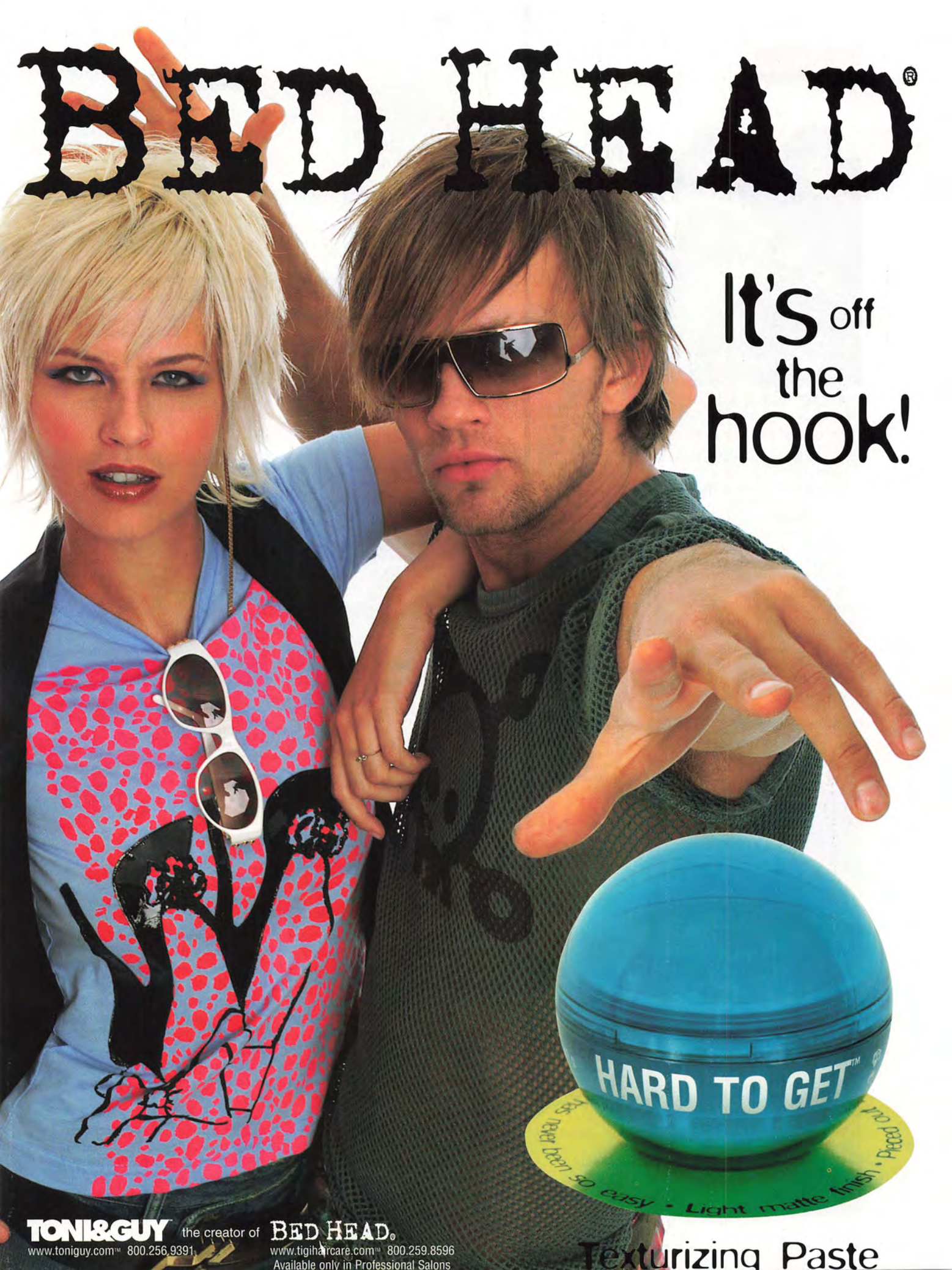
Muppet Animal's greatest influence

"You get a lot of pleasure selling a house, especially a first home to a young couple. It's very rewarding when you give them the keys and they walk away happy.

"I felt like I had to grab ahold of reality." ★

"Everybody from the band still gets along fine. As a matter of fact, I just sold [vocalist and cofounder] Doug Gray his new house. I'm very happy right now. If I could go back and do everything over, I wouldn't do anything differently." *AS TOLD TO JON REGARDIE*

Paul Warner/WireImage.com (Eminem); courtesy of David Allen (Allen, 3); Steve Granitz/WireImage.com (Keith); Gary French (illustration)



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ASS MAN!

Why is Lance Bass wearing a skirt?

>> LANCE BASS recently supported a charity event in Los Angeles by modeling a kilt — and spanking a woman's fishnet-clad ass.

Decked out in a blue camouflage kilt and sporting a "fauxhawk" hairstyle, the 'N Sync star was a celebrity model for the Dewar's Dressed to Kilt fund-raising event, held in support of the Friends of Scotland, a "nonprofit corporation created to advance contemporary Scottish interests."

During his stint on the runway, he was seen bending over a friend and pretending to have sexual intercourse with her from behind. *NOEL BODDIE*

Guitar-on-fire kit not included.

WAH! WAH!

In death, Hendrix becomes a doll

>> JIMI HENDRIX may have died in 1970, but two new dolls showcase the guitar legend in his prime.

Hendrix's family authorized McFarlane Toys to make a six-inch-tall figure wearing velvet pants and a fringed shirt, with a left-handed guitar.

Meanwhile, an ad (above) on capnwacky.com features a doll with a headband "soaked with LSD." The ad is possibly a hoax. *JON REGARDIE*

PLAYLIST

The best new songs to download!*

ALICIA KEYS
"YOU DON'T KNOW MY NAME"
Adopting the persona of a waitress, the pop princess serves up "hot chocolate" and other blaxploitation come-ons on this sweet R&B jam.

AL HIRT
"THE 'GREEN HORNET' THEME"
In a mind-bogglingly complex virtuoso performance, the late, great trumpeter leads a swarm of horns through this swanky Dixieland extravaganza.

TOBY KEITH
"I LOVE THIS BAR"
Country's ass-kicking patriot shows his whimsical side in this tender toast to his favorite watering hole, where both "yuppies" and "hookers" hoist pints.

COLDPLAY
"MOSES"
A Smiths-inspired minor-chord shuffle from the new live CD employs the world's most romantic bridge. That it's about Chris Martin's girlfriend, Gwyneth Paltrow, taints its bittersweet flavor not one bit.

WORD!

"We are an improvement on sliced bread."
THE DARKNESS'S JUSTIN HAWKINS

APPLE IPOD

PRICE $399
MEMORY 20GB (also 10GB and 40GB)
WEIGHT 5.6 ounces
BATTERY LIFE 8 hours
SOFTWARE iTunes (Windows or Mac OS X)
FEATURES Touch-sensitive navigation, address book, voice recording, photo storage, games

IRIVER IHP-120

PRICE $399
MEMORY 20GB
WEIGHT 5.6 ounces
BATTERY LIFE 16 hours
SOFTWARE iHP-120 software (Windows)
FEATURES Line-in and voice recording, external mic, FM tuner, remote control

DELL DIGITAL JUKEBOX

PRICE $329
MEMORY 20GB (also 15GB)
WEIGHT 7.6 ounces
BATTERY LIFE 16 hours
SOFTWARE Musicmatch software (Windows)
FEATURES Built-in mic, voice recorder, rubberized edges and "feet"

SAMSUNG YP-910GS

PRICE $399
MEMORY 20GB
WEIGHT 6 ounces
BATTERY LIFE 10 hours
SOFTWARE Napster or Musicmatch (Windows)
FEATURES Line-in recording, FM tuner/transmitter, 620 preloaded songs, $20 credit

Clones!

How does the iPod stack up against the new MP3 players?

>> THE 1.5 MILLION–selling Apple iPod remains the best MP3 player on the market despite the arrival of three strong challengers recently road-tested by *Blender*.

The iRiver and Samsung players both have features that the iPod does not — including FM tuners that can record songs off the radio. "Line-in recording" enables users to transfer cassette and vinyl collections onto them.

The Samsung's built-in transmitter allows you to play songs from a car or home radio wirelessly, though the recording quality is less than perfect. The Apple has an add-on voice recorder for taking memos; however, the device can't record high-quality audio.

Both the Dell ($70 cheaper than the iPod) and the iRiver boast double the eight-hour battery life of the iPod. Though the Dell rivals the iPod's intuitive, user-friendly interface, the player is much wider, thicker and heavier than the iPod. Surprisingly, it lacks a "random" play function.

Though the Samsung comes with 620 preloaded songs and a $20 Napster credit, the interface is difficult and does not offer playlist-creating, as the others do. And none of them can play audio books, as the trusty iPod can. *VICTORIA DeSILVERIO*

* Note: Not all of the "Playlist" songs are legally available for download — yet. In those instances, *Blender* encourages you to purchase the original CD. Rainey Photo Agency (Bass); Getty Images (iPod); Alphonse Telymonde (Dell and Samsung still-lifes); Gary French (illustration)

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Play music everywhere.

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...and your home stereo

Play songs right on your PC

Hear music on headphones

Roll Over Beethoven.

The new Samsung Napster YP-910GS.

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Useful Tips From the Stars!

HOW TO...

Not Stink!

No shower? No problem! Australian garage-rockers Jet give you the dirt on tricking the world into thinking you care about hygiene

BY STEVE KANDELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEGO

1 PLAY MISTY!

NIC CESTER, GUITAR/VOCALS: "I'm a big fan of the shower-in-a-can method. Just drown your garments in a thick mist of spray deodorant. It's not a cure, but it will buy you a little bit of time until you get to a shower — which can be days if you're on tour. But just remember: Looking dirty is all part of the uniform."

Jet, clockwise from left: Cam Muncey, Chris Cester, Mark Wilson, Nic Cester

2 CAMOUFLAGE!

CHRIS CESTER, DRUMS/VOCALS: "Find the cutest girl in the room and stand next to her. She probably won't talk to you, because, let's face it, you stink. But follow her around so it looks like you're with her. It's like hiding behind the biggest guy during a fight — no one's gonna bug you. In L.A., you're lucky: Stink is chic."

3 GO SLEEVELESS!

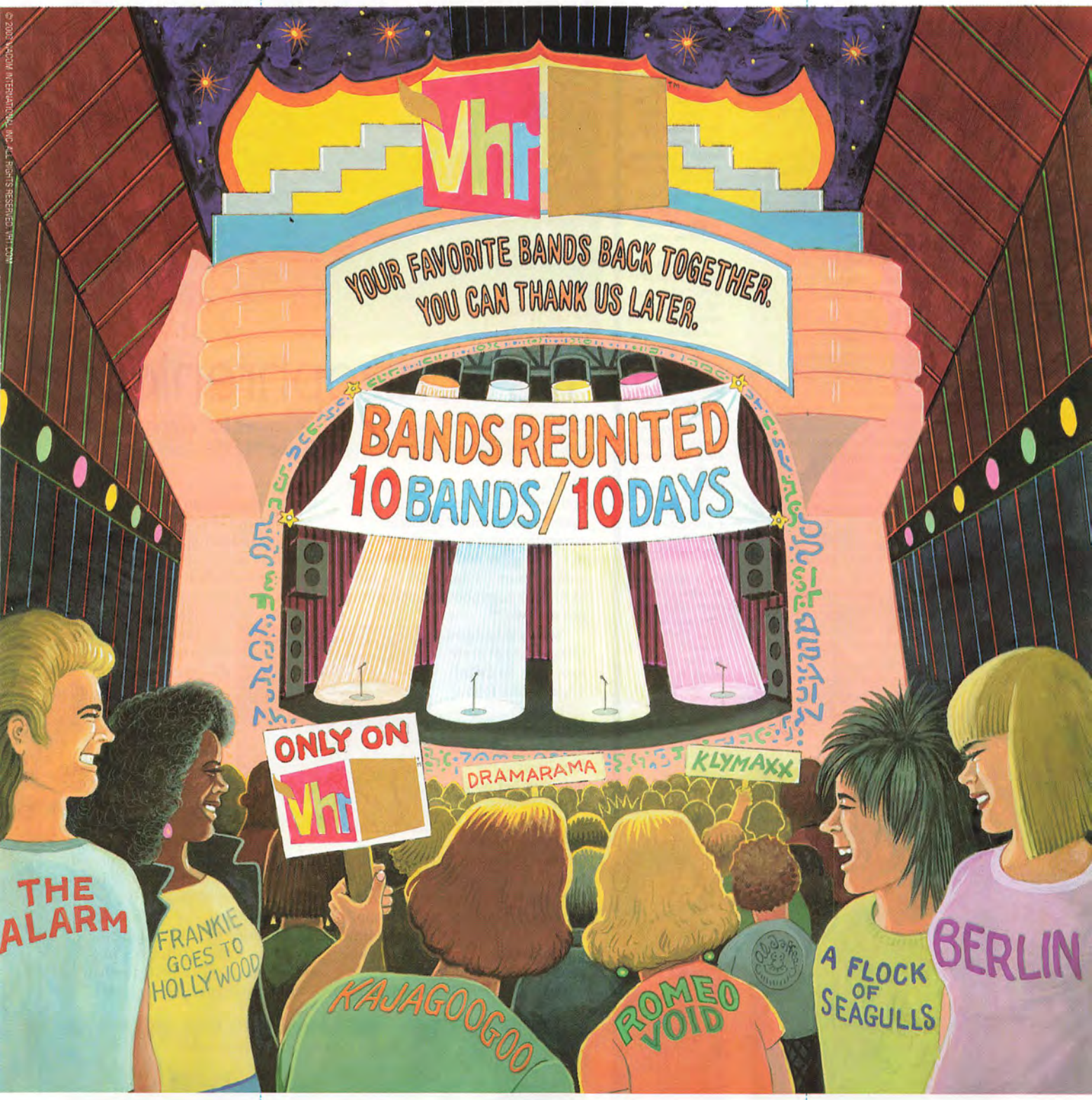
CAM MUNCEY, GUITAR/VOCALS: "Cut the sleeves off your shirts — that way there's no chance for the armpits to get stinky. For pants, always stick with jeans, because they look better when they're all messed up anyway. And even if your pants get really nasty, tell people they were dark brown when you bought 'em."

4 FLY OVERSEAS!

MARK WILSON, BASS: "International flights are gold mines — they give you those new, clean socks. These things all help. A beanie makes for a great disguise when your hair is so greasy you can use it to fry eggs. And you can always pick up new tighty-whiteys or T-shirts at truck stops."

→ **JET'S DEBUT ALBUM, *GET BORN* (ELEKTRA), IS OUT NOW.**

A ► FOLD PAGE SO THAT "A" MEETS "B" ◄ B



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Vive la destruction, eh?

HOSERS!

Canadian fans of punk band the Exploited riot, destroy 42 cars

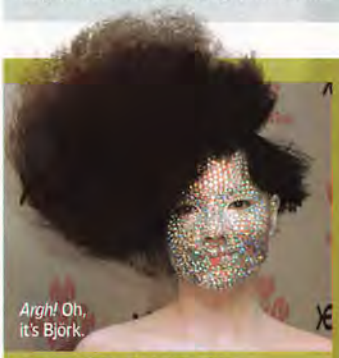
>> SEVERAL HUNDRED punk fans overturned cars and threw trash cans through store windows in downtown Montreal after veteran Scottish band the Exploited were turned back at the Canadian border and forced to cancel their gig at the Medley nightclub.

The Exploited had claimed they were "tourists" to immigration officials despite their truckloads of equipment.

Rioters damaged 42 vehicles, including six police cars. Authorities made seven arrests.

"It's shocking," said Jon Rinaldo of Joker Productions, which had canceled the band's gig at a 1,000-capacity venue in Pittsburgh after selling only 20 tickets. "I didn't think anyone would get that upset they weren't playing."

In its '80s heyday, the group was banned from Germany after police had to break up a gig with tear gas. In Finland, a female fan bit off the end of singer Wattie Buchan's tongue. *STEVE LOWE*



Argh! Oh, it's Björk.

FREAKY!

What is on Björk's face?

>> BJÖRK SHOCKED London partygoers recently when she showed up for a charity event with sequins glued to her face. "She looked like the Phantom of the Opera crossed with Robocop," remarked one onlooker.

The Icelandic star was attending the Fashion Rocks for the Prince's Trust benefit at the Royal Albert Hall. She sang "Bachelorette," from her 1997 album, *Homogenic*. *NOEL BODDIE*

News Roundup!

ELTON JOHN, following in the footsteps of fellow diva Céline Dion, has signed a deal with Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas reportedly worth more than $50 million. He is booked to perform 75 shows over the next three years.

Thom Yorke has said **RADIOHEAD** is tired of producing "albums, albums, albums." The band's next release might be an EP, he added.

PRINCE, a recently converted Jehovah's Witness, has been knocking on doors to secure his place in the afterlife. A Minneapolis couple say the star recently tried to convert them from Judaism before thanking them for their time and returning to his car.

P.O.D. were forced to cancel a gig in Siegen, Germany, after some of the venue's ceiling loosened and fell to the floor during sound check.

WORD!

"I'd have to take a break from music for a minute to do acting, because I feel a little ignorant to the art."

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE

Alanis Morissette with producers John Shanks (left) and Tim Thorney

In the Studio ★

"It's Schizophrenic!"

Alanis Morissette's new record is influenced by "everything from hip-hop to heavy rock to light pop." Tasty!

>> "I LIKE TO write about whatever feels relevant to me at any given time," says Alanis Morissette, currently in Groovemasters Studios in Los Angeles recording her sixth studio album. "I don't like the idea of fulfilling anybody's expectations but my own."

With a scheduled release date of early February, *So Called Chaos* — the follow-up to 2002's multi-platinum *Under Rug Swept* — represents the singer at the height of her powers.

"I love this record," she says. "It's quite schizophrenic style-wise, but that's because I have schizophrenic tastes. I'm influenced by everything from hip-hop to heavy rock to light pop."

As on Morissette's other albums, the lyrical themes of her new songs stem from the daily journal she obsessively keeps. The main difference now, she says, is that she's finally able to laugh at herself.

"It's true! There's a lot of sarcasm and self-deprecation here, as well as my usual stuff, like, quote-unquote, revelation. I used to be fueled by the need to prove myself."

No longer driven by the prospect of commercial success — her 1995 album, *Jagged Little Pill*, with more than 20 million sold, has quenched that thirst — Canada's queen of confessional rock wants to explore other media.

"Once this record is finished, I'll make another movie. [In 1999, she played God in Kevin Smith's *Dogma*.] It's called *Dharma Heart*, and it'll be improvisational, like [the films of British director] Mike Leigh," she says. "I'm about to turn 30. I'm excited and feel like I can do whatever I want in my life." *NICK DUERDEN*

ALL ABOUT MY ALBUM!

ARTIST
Alanis Morissette

STUDIO
Groovemasters Studios, L.A.

PRODUCERS
John Shanks and Tim Thorney

LAST RECORD
Under Rug Swept (MAVERICK, 2002)

NEW RECORD
So Called Chaos (DUE IN FEBRUARY)

Selfish Cunt: Soon to be a household name

ALSO IN THE STUDIO >>>>

<< U.K./New Zealand punk duo **SELFISH CUNT** are in a makeshift recording studio in London working on their self-produced debut, due out in March....

Scottish singer **JOHNATHAN RICE** is in Lincoln, Nebraska, with Bright Eyes producer Mike Mogis, recording his major-label debut, due in mid-2004....

Chill-out kings **ZERO 7** are working on the follow-up to 2002's near-platinum album *Simple Things* in a London studio for a late-February release....

Power-pop punks **UNWRITTEN LAW** are in a studio in San Diego with a "secret" producer completing their follow-up to 2002's *Elva*....

Zach Cordner (Morissette); Morissette's hair and makeup: Natalie MacGowan-Spencer for celestineagency.com; Christine Muschi/Reuters/Landov (riot); Mark Stewart/Camera Press/Retna Ltd. (Björk); Gary French (illustration)

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WEILAND WATCH!

"Beam me up!": Scotty

BLOCKHEAD

Scott Weiland screws up again, is given another chance

>> "I'VE NEVER intentionally done anything to hurt anyone," Scott Weiland recently told *Blender* at Lavish Studios in Los Angeles. "But I have hurt people indirectly, and I have regret about that."

Two days earlier, at 6:30 A.M. on October 27, the day he turned 36, Weiland slammed his BMW into a parked car in Hollywood and was arrested while attempting to flee the scene. He was booked — and later charged — for driving under the influence. He was then granted temporary freedom in exchange for $15,000 bail.

Velvet Revolver

Although the incident was a violation of Weiland's probation (which he received for pleading no contest to a heroin-possession charge last August), a judge sentenced the singer to six months in a residential rehabilitation program and granted him time to record with his new band, Velvet Revolver.

Weiland said he believes that Velvet Revolver, which includes former Guns N' Roses members Slash and Duff McKagan, is his saving grace. "It's a second chance at being born into rock & roll," he said. "The band's music is defiant and indulgent and destructive, and it pushes me in a new direction." *STEVE KANDELL*

"I've never intentionally done anything to hurt anyone."

Obits

TONY THOMPSON
48, November 12, in Encino, California, of cancer. Session drummer who powered the disco band Chic. His studio credits include David Bowie's *Let's Dance* and Madonna's *Like a Virgin*. He was a member of the supergroup Power Station and played with Led Zeppelin at Live Aid in 1985.

BOBBY HATFIELD
63, November 5, in Kalamazoo, Michigan, of a heart attack. Half of the Righteous Brothers, the blue-eyed soul duo famous for "Unchained Melody" and "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling." Hatfield's body was discovered 30 minutes before a Righteous Brothers performance.

MICHAEL KAMEN
55, November 18, in London, of a heart attack. A prolific composer of film scores who worked with Bryan Adams and Metallica, Kamen won multiple Grammy Awards.

CHUBBY JACKSON
84, October 1, in Poway, California, of cancer. A jazz bassist of the big-band era, Jackson was a driving force in Woody Herman's "First Herd" orchestra. Jackson was among the 57 jazz stars assembled in 1958 for the famous "A Great Day in Harlem" photograph.

(Above) Wynonna Judd's mug shot; (inset) in happier times

Ironic!

Country star gets pulled over after hosting boozy TV show

>> COUNTRY STAR Wynonna Judd has been charged with driving under the influence after police stopped her for speeding on November 13 near Nashville's famous Music Row.

When stopped, Judd reportedly smelled of alcohol, had watery eyes and dilated pupils and failed to remember how many drinks she had consumed that evening. She later admitted that while she was celebrating a friend's birthday and her own impending wedding to bodyguard D.R. Roach, she had "clearly let my excitement get the best of me."

The 39-year-old singer's most recent album — *What the World Needs Now Is Love* — topped the country charts in 2003.

Her arrest came just days after she hosted the television show *Morning After: The 40 Greatest Drinking Songs of Country Music*, which aired on CMT. *STEVE LOWE*

CHEZ JACKO

Michael Jackson's home is full of childish things . . .

A VIDEOTAPE HAS recently surfaced that reveals Michael Jackson's obsession with childish artifacts.

Shot sometime after allegations that Jackson abused a 13-year-old boy first emerged in 1993, the tape shows rooms packed with children's toys, pictures of young boys, a message from child star Macaulay Culkin and a golden throne for Jackson himself. The 45-year-old star's home was searched again in November following accusations that he molested a 12-year-old boy. *NOEL BODDIE*

A signed picture of Macaulay Culkin

Jacko's throne. Nice!

George Chin (Weiland); Splash News (Judd mug shot); Len Irish/Corbis Outline (Judd inset); Jeff Kravitz/FilmMagic.com (Jackson); Splash News (Neverland, 2); Karl Larsen/Zuma Press/Newscom (Velvet Revolver)

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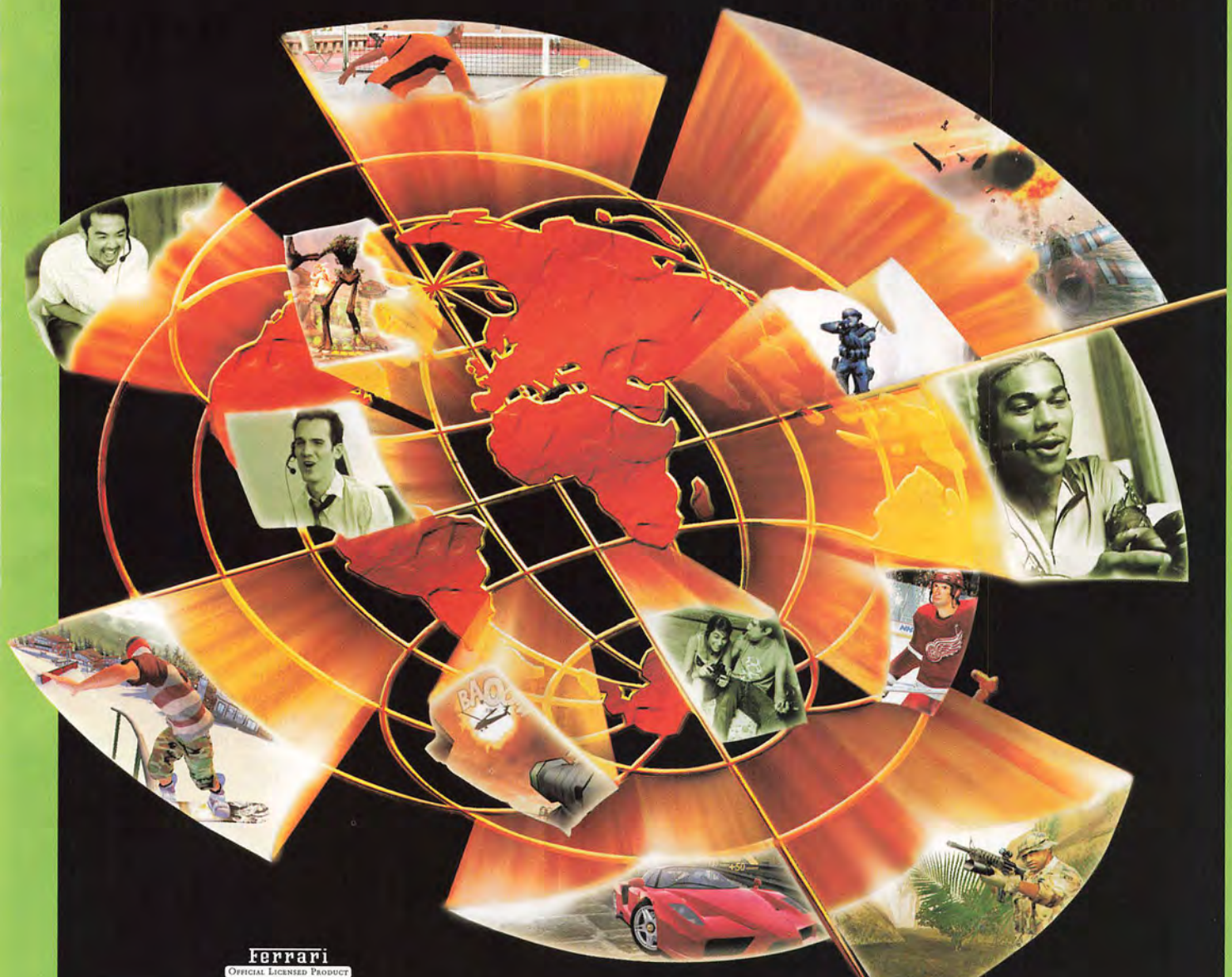

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Night Moves

After years of struggling in obscurity, **Bob Seger** knew he had a surefire hit in his tune touting the joys of sex in the back seat of a Chevy. Too bad he had to sneak behind his own band's back to record it. Ouch!

["What can you say about a great song? A great song is a great song. This is a fucking *great* song!" KID ROCK]

27 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH — January 1977

AT THE START of the '70s, Bob Seger looked like a classic one-hit wonder. Already a veteran of several long-forgotten outfits including Doug Brown and the Omens, the Beach Bums and the Last Heard, he had dented the Top 20 in January 1969 with "Ramblin' Gamblin' Man," but unable to repeat that success, the 24-year-old singer quit the music business by the end of '69 to go to college. Anyone looking at those facts would have been forgiven for writing him off.

Instead, Seger returned to music and slowly built a reputation as a high-octane live artist who could show a crowd a good time. Even so, hits evaded him for years, until he capitalized on his reputation with a rousing in-concert album, *Live Bullet*, that put him and his Silver Bullet Band into the lower reaches of the Top 40 in the summer of 1976.

Having made that breakthrough, Seger now had to prove himself in the recording studio, and he set to work on what would become "Night Moves" in Toronto's Soundstage. The studio was co-owned by producer Jack Richardson, who remembers, "Bob had been noodling around on the piano in my office, and I told him I thought he had the makings of a good song there, though he didn't feel the same way at the time."

Seger had, in fact, already been working on a song for quite a while, getting nowhere slowly. "I

Darryl Pitt/Retna Ltd.

Bob Seger's uppercut knocked bassist Chris Campbell's beard clean off.

had the first two verses for five or six months," he recalls. "I was trying to write something in a narrative style, like Kris Kristofferson's 'Me and Bobby McGee,' about what it was like growing up in Ann Arbor [Michigan]. In the '60s, we used to have parties called grassers, because they'd be in the fields. One guy had a record player in his car dashboard, so he'd put on James Brown or the Ronettes or Solomon Burke and we'd dance in the headlights — which was one of the meanings for the phrase *night moves*."

Seger's intention, however, was to use the phrase in several ways, one of which referred to the moves he and his friends would make on girls. In particular, he was thinking of one black-haired Italian beauty who had introduced him to the delights of back-seat sex. "You know, the girl with the big breasts who we all went *ka-zappo* for when we reached puberty. It was a really mad, crazy affair."

With Richardson and his manager, Punch Andrews, on his back to get the track finished, Seger buckled down. "Hearing Bruce Springsteen's 'Jungleland' got me going," he says. "It had an unusual construction with several different bridges in it, and I realized I could do the same thing with 'Night Moves.'"

When he played it for Andrews, his response was, "This is a monster. You must get it recorded." Completing the song, though, didn't bring Seger's problems to an end. "I had my band with me in the studio, but I didn't hear this song as a typical band thing. I wanted my own feeling on it. I didn't want to hurt their feelings, because they're great players and good friends, but my guitarist, Drew Abbott, had a very different rhythmic sense than me, and I didn't hear any place in the song for a sax."

As the sessions for the album, also called *Night Moves*, started to wind down, Seger and Richardson suggested that any musicians who had already completed their parts could go home. They did, leaving Seger a free hand to finish the track according to his specifications. "That's why we ended up recording it at 2:30 in the morning," Seger remembers. "We had to wait until the guys went home."

Seger's anxiety about getting the mood of "Night Moves" right stemmed from his conviction that it was more than just another album track: "I knew it could be what we call a career song, a song that sets an artist up for years, but it was different from anything else that we had done."

Richardson had also realized that this atmospheric slow-burner was a radical departure for a hard-rocker like Seger. "It was sparse," he says, "but I looked at Bob as a street singer. The delivery of the track needed to be raw. It wasn't just reflecting the needs of this one song; it was about reflecting the way Bob comes across."

The lineup that created the finished track consisted of Silver Bullet Band drummer Charlie Allen Martin and bassist Chris Campbell plus two local musicians, Doug Riley on keyboards and Joe Miquelon on electric guitar. "Richardson went nuts for it," Seger says, "and we came back a month later to add the finishing touches."

The path to megabucks, however, rarely runs smoothly. Richardson, justifiably proud of what they had achieved on "Night Moves," was stunned months later to find that the track had not yet been submitted to Capitol Records. "In the end, I played it to their A&R man, John Carter, and he loved it. It was about five minutes long, so I suggested a couple of edits that would bring it down to single length, and that was it."

Well, almost. Richardson's initial delight when "Night Moves" entered the *Billboard* chart in December 1976 was muted somewhat when he noticed that Punch Andrews was credited as producer. "Punch hadn't even been at the session," he says. "I called John Carter and told him he had 24 hours to get the credits right. In the next issue [of *Billboard*], it read 'Producers: Jack Richardson and Punch Andrews.' But it's all been sorted out since then."

"Night Moves" went on to become Seger's multiplatinum signature song and, as he had hoped, the foundation of a successful career. Even more remarkable, though, is that since its release, the song has inspired a band, a ballet, sundry nightclubs and several novels all bearing the name Night Moves. "I guess," Seger says with a chuckle, "people must kinda like it." *JOHNNY BLACK*

VITAL STATISTICS

SONG
"Night Moves"

ARTIST
Bob Seger and the Silver Bullet Band

LABEL
Capitol

PERFORMERS
Bob Seger
vocals/guitar
Charlie Allen Martin
drums
Chris Campbell
bass
Doug Riley
piano, organ
Joe Miquelon
guitar
Rhonda Silver
Laurel Ward
Sharon Williams
backup vocals

PRODUCER
Jack Richardson

RELEASED
October 1976

HIGHEST CHART POSITION
4

WHO'S WHO

BOB SEGER
Detroit hard-rocker turned multiplatinum AOR balladeer and Chevy pitchman. Was recently nominated for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

JACK RICHARDSON
Canadian producer; mortgaged his house to fund the first Guess Who hit. Canada's most prestigious production award is named for him.

CHRIS CAMPBELL
The mustachioed Campbell, who played on the finished track, has been Bob Seger's bassist in the Silver Bullet Band for more than 30 years.

Michael Ochs Archives.com (Silver Bullet Band, Seger, Campbell); Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)

Dear Superstar

YOU SEND QUESTIONS, WE GET ANSWERS. WHO LOVES YA, BABY?

Tenacious D

You asked folk-metal/comedy icons Jack Black and Kyle Gass to reveal their favorite sex tips, swear words and, um, rectum-related anecdotes. So really, you've got only yourselves to blame. . . .

BY CLARK COLLIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUSTIN STEPHENS

"I REMEMBER one time I didn't think Kyle liked me," Jack Black says. "And he said, 'Dude, if you were a chick, I would fuck you.' And it made me feel better."

Sitting outside his management company's Los Angeles office, the 34-year-old Black is recalling the start of his relationship with fellow musician, actor, stoner and non–calorie counter Kyle Gass, 42. The two met in the early '90s while in Tim Robbins's theater troupe, the Actors' Gang, and their friendship would bear fruit with their comedy-folk-metal band, Tenacious D, the self-proclaimed "rockingest band in the world." At the moment they're also one of the busiest, with a film in the works and the release of their DVD *Tenacious D — The Complete Masterworks.*

Of course, interest in all things D has reached new heights following Black's starmaking turn in last year's *School of Rock.* What his new legion of underage fans might make of the band's "Fuck Her Gently" remains to be seen.

"I do get a lot more kids pointing at me on the street," Black admits, lighting a cigarette in preparation for the first of your queries. "But it's a lot better than having grownups pointing at you, trust me."

"A pox on your questions!": Jack Black (left) and Kyle Gass

Do you have any sex tips other than "Fuck Her Gently"?

BOILTHEBOY, PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY

KYLE GASS: I would say a good exercise for couples who are getting a little stale is to be really close together, but don't touch each other. But when you're in sex world, everything should be allowed. If I want my girlfriend to dress up like a Girl Scout, and then I want to fuck her with a big dildo, double penetration . . .

JACK BLACK: I think it's good to just slide it in and just leave it there in total stillness — with eye contact and an uncomfortable silence.

Give up one secret about Dave Grohl, who played on Tenacious D's debut.

TOXICATED, BURBANK, CALIFORNIA

GASS: We want him to drum on the next album too, so I probably shouldn't reveal anything. I guess the thing is, he's just really not as nice as everyone says he is. He's really nice! But he's not as nice as everyone says. He's really hard to pin down.

Which one of you is the better guitarist? Who's the better joint roller?

LILYLALA, TEMPE, ARIZONA

BLACK: Kyle's a better joint roller than me.

GASS: And I'm the better guitarist.

BLACK: Kyle is technically much better than me on guitar. Yet somehow, I rock harder. I make up for my lack of skill with intensity. I wish Kyle would have said it, but here I am, tooting my own horn.

Who were your musical heroes as kids?

LOSERVILLE, ELKO, NEVADA

BLACK: I'm gonna go ABBA. I'm gonna go Simon & Garfunkel. I'm gonna go Black Sabbath. But Bobby McFerrin was probably the person who first inspired me to play music. I liked him before "Don't Worry, Be Happy," back when he was keeping it real. When I first saw him, he was performing at the Grammys. I was 14 or 15, and he was a one-man band with no instrument. That reminded me of what I wanted to do as a little kid. I wanted to be onstage singing with one note coming out of one nostril, and the harmony coming out of the other nostril and something else coming out of the ear.

I went to some of his concerts. He had some audience participation where he would ask 12 people to →

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Styling: Erika Scott; grooming: Lauren Cohen for Luxe

come up from the audience. So I bolted up there. I started slapping my chest along with the music, and he gave me this little "Don't do that" look. And I knew right then that I would never be part of his crew. But who's laughing now?

Did either of you consider running for governor of California?
ROLLEDGOLD, LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA

BLACK: At first I did — I thought it would be good if we ran as a team. But when I saw how many people did run, I was glad that we didn't. It didn't really seem original. What would have been our platform? Legalize weed.

If you could pick anyone to have a love scene with, who would you choose?
PIZZAPROVE, PROSPECT HEIGHTS, ILLINOIS

GASS: Back when she was younger, I used to have a boner for Jennifer Connelly. Now she seems a little staid. Who's that new chick? Katie Holmes! She's a little temptress.
BLACK: She really annoys me on the talk shows, though. I like that Charlie's Angel. Lucy Liu.

What preshow routine gets you in a rocking mood?
ROME93, HILTON HEAD ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA

GASS: Jack generally likes to take a few donkey craps.
BLENDER: *Is that a sex thing?*
BLACK: No, that's just a regular crap, but a little bit larger. A donkey crap is delivered with force, kind of like a donkey kick. The butterflies in your stomach tend to stir around some shit, and you end up crapping a couple of loads. I get scared, I'm not going to lie to you.

Did you consider any band names other than Tenacious D?
MRSHOW1, PERU, VERMONT

BLACK: The Responsive Chord.
GASS: The Axelords Featuring Gorgozon's Mistress.
BLACK: Balboa's Beautiful Beard.

Of all the objects you may have inserted in your rectum, which was the most enjoyable?
MJPARLIER, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

GASS: I'm kind of weird about my b-hole. It feels to me like nothing should go in there. I'm not anal retentive, I'm anal expulsive. When I was a child, I wanted to shit and show it to you. I don't want things stuck in there.
BLACK: When I was a kid, I put Cocoa Puffs in the crack of my ass for comedy. I was 6 or 7 years old, and I thought Cocoa Puffs in the butt was about the funniest thing that could possibly happen. But since then, the only thing that has gone in there was my finger, one time. Well, OK — two times.
GASS: I met this chick one time, and — this is always a bad thing — she was raving about her blow jobs. She was like, "I am the *best*. I am so good you don't even want to try it." And then she starts doing it, and of course it's kind of lame. But then she starts putting her finger around my butthole. . . .
BLACK: Uh-oh. . . .
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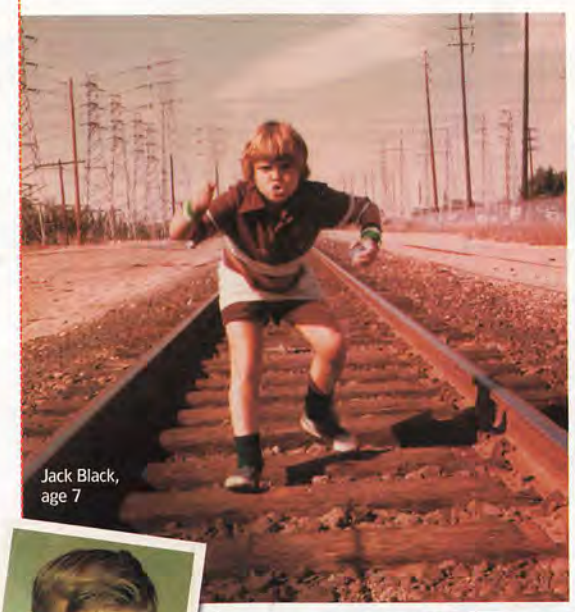
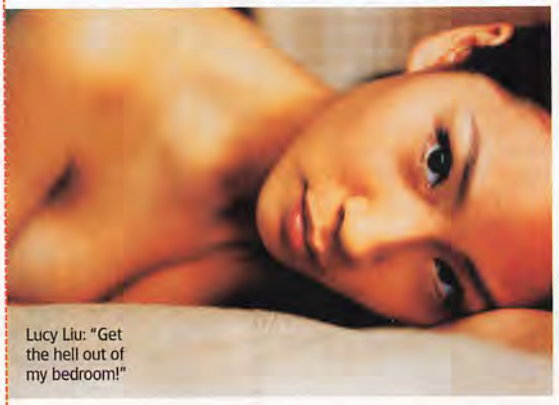

Jack Black, age 7

Kyle Gass, third grade

ABBA: *"Hei!"*


Lucy Liu: "Get the hell out of my bedroom!"

Jack Black (left): "Stop the *Waterworld* . . . I wanna get off!"

Which of you gets the most groupies?
NONONONO, SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO

GASS: I think I probably end up with more. But only because of my intense desire to recapture my lost youth through the boning of young women. And it works! It works every time. It's like — yeah! Yeah! Yeah! I feel young again! [*Gass's cellphone rings*]
BLACK: There's one now. They call Kyle's phone the puss-o-nator. What's the word for your bevy of bitches?
GASS: The stable. The funny thing is, it's an actual stable. It's a really free place, though. It's a place where you can explore. It's neat.

If you're the most rocking band in the world, who's the least?
ARTFULDODGER, OSWEGO, NEW YORK

GASS: I don't know. Coldplay? They don't really rock. But I love Coldplay.
BLACK: [*Suddenly incensed*] Well, then, they're rocking! I'm going to go with Enrique Iglesias.

What's your favorite swear word?
POPSTAR1, CLEVELAND

GASS: *Fuck-a-loo-banzai!*
BLACK: *Fuck-a-luck-a-ding-dong!*

I heard that a lot of your musical inspiration comes from smoking pot. Is that true?
BONGMAN, CASPER, WYOMING

BLACK: It's an ingredient you add to an already delicious pasta. I mean, if you don't have that delicious pasta, throwing the weed on top of it is not going to help. Smoking the weed might give you the munchies, but it's not going to make a shit sandwich taste good.

I'm getting married in Columbus, Ohio, next June. Will you guys play at my wedding?
NANCYDREW, COLUMBUS, OHIO

GASS: I usually do really well with the ladies in Columbus. So my answer would be yes.

Courtesy of Jack Black (Black); courtesy of Kyle Gass (Gass); LFI (ABBA); Antoine Verglas/Corbis Outline (Liu); Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)

"When you're in sex world, everything should be allowed."

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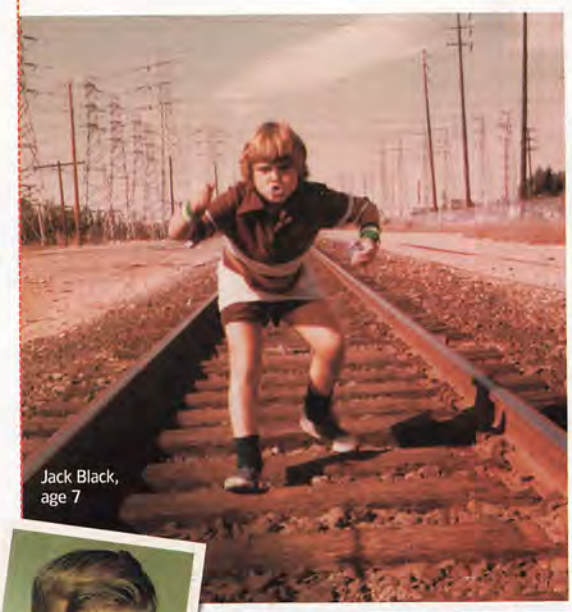
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Courtesy of Jack Black (Black); courtesy of Kyle Gass (Gass); LFI (ABBA); Antoine Verglas/Corbis Outline (Liu); Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)

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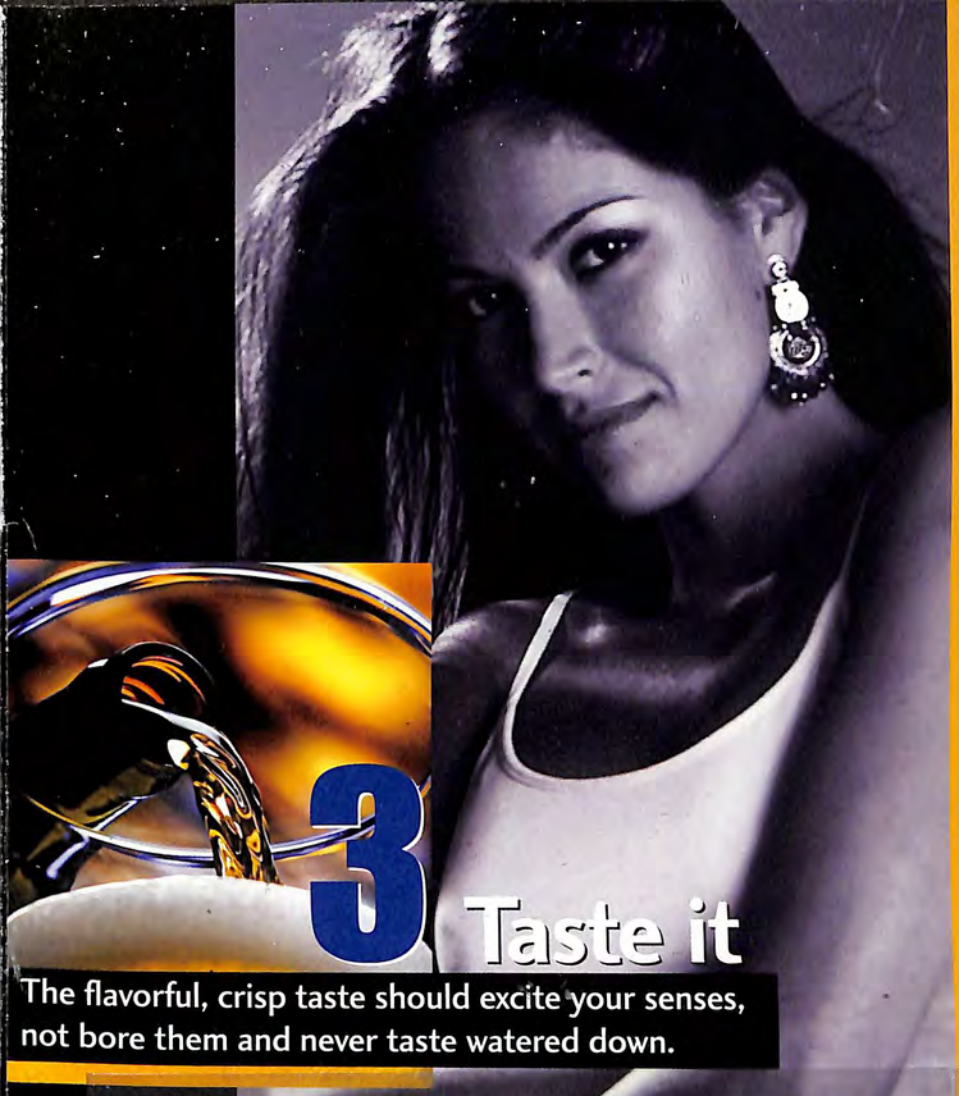

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Wham! have not aged well.

BLACK: My answer would be no. It just sounds like a really long haul for a very uncomfortable situation, with some kids who are too young and parents who don't want to hear us.

What's the worst job that you guys have ever had?
ROYGBIV, COVINGTON, KENTUCKY

BLACK: I've had only one job in my life besides acting and music. It was telemarketing, and I was not good at it. I don't remember what I was trying to sell, although I want to say it had something to do with whales. Besides that, I'm going to have to say it was when I was in that shitty movie with Sylvester Stallone [*Demolition Man*, 1993].

Who's crazier: Courtney Love or Michael Jackson?
OOPSCHICK, QUEENS, NEW YORK

GASS: Oh, I'd say Michael Jackson. Courtney Love wants to be the bad rocker, but Michael — he seems, like, a step beyond.
BLACK: Yeah. He's not doing any heroin. He's just really fuckin' fucked up. He's certifiable. You shouldn't be able to buy kids. Just because you're rich enough to buy them doesn't mean you should be allowed to have them.

Kyle, have you ever lied about liking one of Jack's movies?
THEDUDE, MONTREAL

GASS: Oh, yeah. Of course! But early on, Jack put forward the rule that no matter what it is that the other person is doing, it's great. It's just better that way, because you always know what to say: "Dude, excellent!"

Jack, if I were to rent one of your early movies, which would you recommend: *The Jackal*, *Waterworld* or *Neverending Story III*?
ABELINCOLN, BOSTON

BLACK: *Neverending Story III.*
GASS: That's a good performance.
BLACK: No, it's not. But it's definitely the funniest of the three, just because of how bad it is.

"We've never had an actual double-team. And I don't want to." ★

I'm blonde, pretty and 22 years old, and I would like to be the meat in a Tenacious D sandwich. What do you guys say?
MOLLYROX, SEATTLE

BLACK: We've never had an actual double-team. And I don't want to.
GASS: I'd like to see a picture.
BLACK: So you're saying you'd be into an open-face sandwich, without me on the other end.
GASS: Yeah, I don't need you there, spoiling my . . . share.
BLACK: I'm not into that thing with the high-fives over the girl's back. I'm not really into that kind of bonding.

What's the strangest rumor that you've ever heard about yourselves?
SUPERBAD, KNOXVILLE

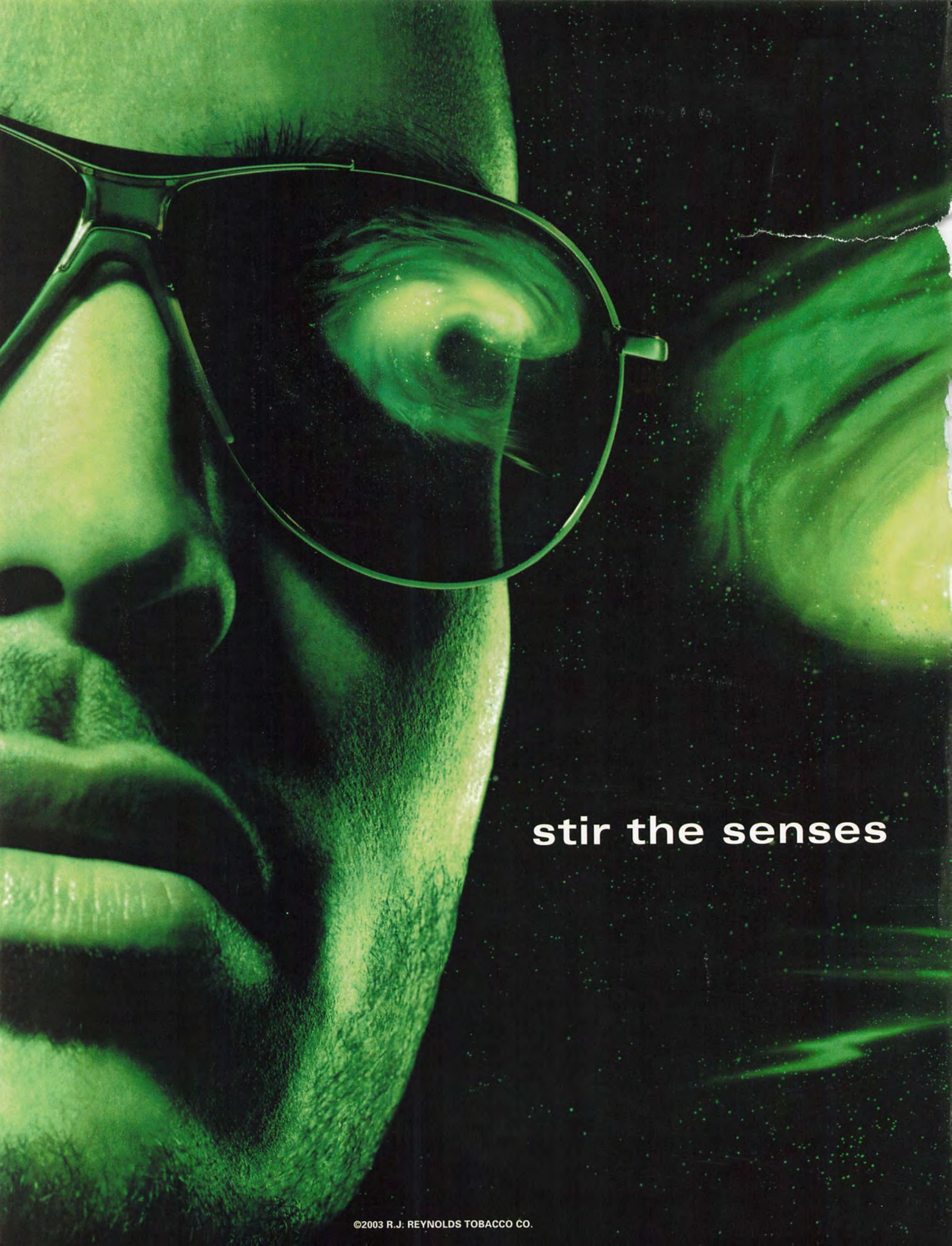
GASS: I heard that I was in *School of Rock*. My parents swore I was in it because they watched a trailer on the Internet. I said, "Mom and Dad, I didn't shoot a frame of it!" But my mom said, "You don't think I know my own kid?" My mind was spinning. I'm going, "Maybe they Photoshopped me in as some sort of prank." Then I saw the trailer, and there's a bald guy with a goatee who looks nothing like me.

What do you remember about Tenacious D's appearance in the 1996 Pauly Shore vehicle *Bio-Dome*?
JIMBOX, RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

BLACK: I remember that they tried to get us to sign away all the rights to Tenacious D songs for all time while we were at lunch. I was sure they were going to fire us if we didn't sign. And now, indeed, we do owe all of our royalties and our residuals to *Bio-Dome*.
GASS: I don't think we had a scene with Pauly Shore.
BLACK: No, but we met him years later at a legalize-marijuana benefit.
GASS: I said, "Pauly, I know it's important to legalize it, but maybe it's not working for you."

Do you guys watch *American Idol*?
BRITSNIT, MOBILE, ALABAMA

BLACK: No. I'm strictly *Survivor*. I love to see hungry people fighting for a fucking nacho. [BLENDER]



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Ask Blender

SOLVING YOUR POP CONUNDRUMS SINCE 2001

Neil Young (center) with the Band's Rick Danko and Robbie Robertson

Is that really cocaine visible in Neil Young's nose in the 1976 concert film *The Last Waltz*?

PAT WILSON, SAN DIEGO

Yes. The offending lump was airbrushed by the best rotoscope technology money could buy, but as you noticed, it's still not invisible. Martin Scorsese's documentary of the Band's 1976 farewell concert catches a glazed, gnashing Young fresh from a two-day coke binge. (Apparently, the backstage area was knee-deep in the stuff.)

"It's a wonder I wasn't dead after that show," Young later admitted. "The things we did — Jesus Christ. The abuse, staying up 48 hours before the show. . . . And I was still up when I got to the Last Waltz."

In preliminary footage, the cocaine blob was unmistakable; Young's manager, Elliot Roberts, said it was "like a white M&M." Scorsese and the Band's Robbie Robertson wanted the rock to stay for extra realness, but Roberts demanded its removal, which cost thousands of dollars. "The most expensive cocaine I ever bought," Robertson moaned.

What precipitated Courtney Love's punching Bikini Kill's Kathleen Hanna during Lollapalooza in 1995? I heard they were lifelong rivals.

JOHNNY RUIZ, VIA E-MAIL

Courtney Love

The Bikini Kill singer knew Kurt Cobain long before Love did; she once spray-painted KURT SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT on his wall, giving the Nirvana singer the idea for a new song title. Love was never a fan of Hanna's, and when the two met in 1995, it wasn't pretty.

On the first day of Lollapalooza, backstage in George, Washington, Love punched Hanna — and threw candy on her! — after Hanna allegedly muttered, "Where's [your] baby? In the closet with an IV?"

According to Love's tour diary: "I just snapped. My hand was filled with Skittles and a couple of Tootsie Rolls. I threw them up in the air and went, '*Baaaa!*' Then she shoved me, and I clocked her. This all happened within five seconds."

Bodyguards stepped in before anything else occurred. Hanna pressed assault charges; Love received a one-year jail sentence, suspended on condition of taking classes in what was then a relatively new discipline: anger management.

YOUR QUESTIONS >>

Ask Blender,
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New York,
New York 10018

E-mail:
askblender@blender.com

Please include your first and last name, your hometown and your state or province. Cool!

Michael Jackson: "And I want that new nose here by Thursday!"

Paula Abdul

Jackie Jackson

I heard that Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean" is about a real girl. Is this true?

STEPHANIE MATSON, BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

>> Jackson used to tell journalists that the song — about a woman who wrongly accuses a man of fathering her baby — was based on a real paternity suit filed against him. But it's possible that this was partly Jackson's attempt to combat rumors that he was gay.

One intriguing rumor that made the rounds was that the song was inspired by none other than Paula Abdul. While a cheerleader for the L.A. Lakers, Abdul allegedly had an affair with Jackson's older brother, Jackie, after he spotted her at a game. His wife said she found out after Abdul called her claiming she had just aborted Jackson's baby.

Eventually, the affair was said to have destroyed the marriage, for which Michael never forgave Abdul, inspiring his song of a clingy mistress about her.

It's a pretty good story, but alas, it's quite untrue: Paula and Jackie met *after* "Billie Jean" was recorded.

I heard that Rivers Cuomo of Weezer once destroyed an entire album's worth of songs after a bad studio session, between *Pinkerton* and the Green Album. What happened?

DOUGLAS MOORE, WEST CHESTER, PENNSYLVANIA

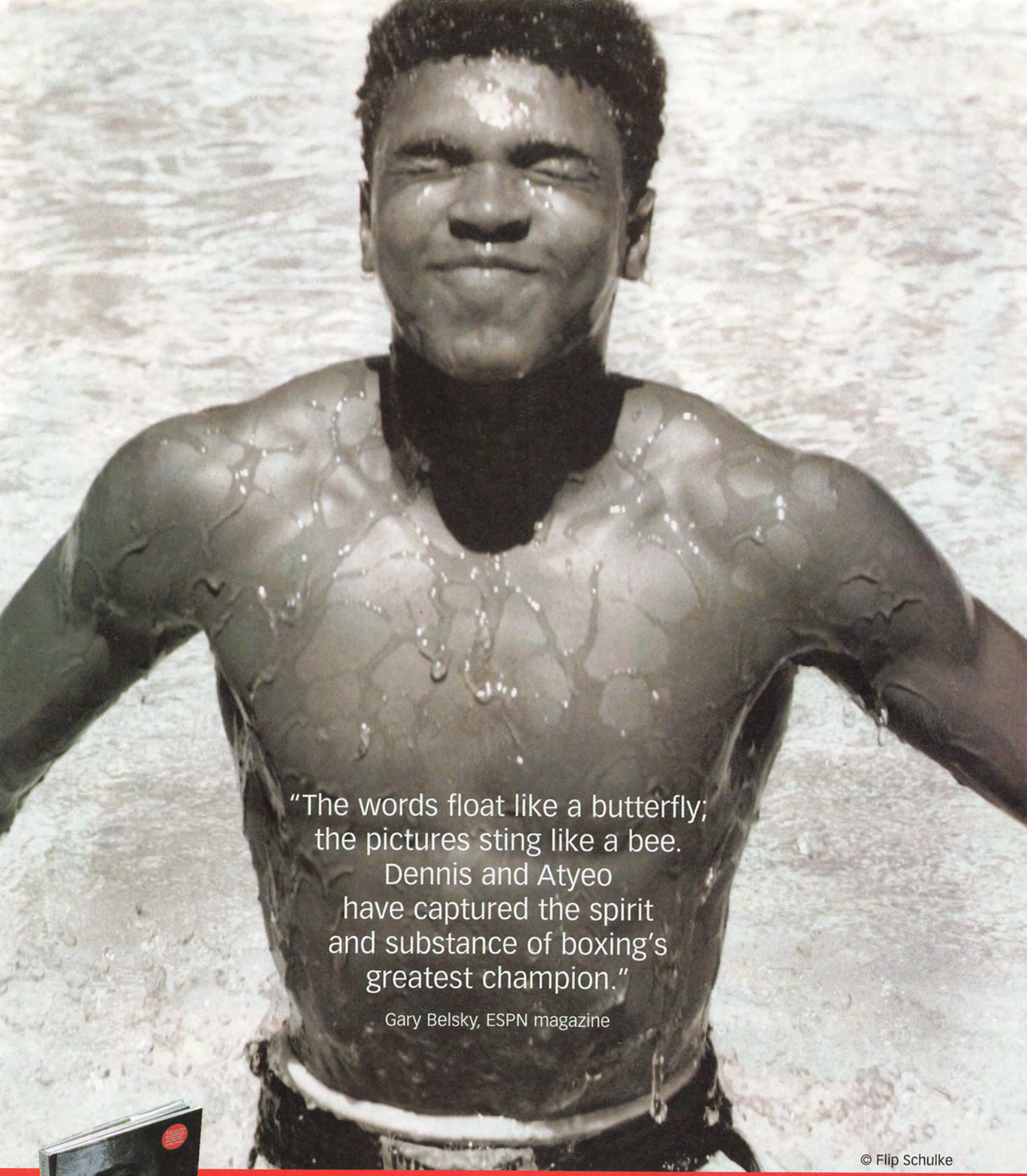
Cuomo has destroyed tapes of unused songs throughout Weezer's career, but burning the master tapes to a whole album? That's one of the many false rumors regarding his post-*Pinkerton* meltdown in 1996. (He never spent an entire day seated, bouncing a ball against a wall, either.)

Weezer's Rivers Cuomo

One story from this period is true, though: Cuomo did move into a Culver City, California, apartment under a freeway interchange. The place had no phone or TV; Cuomo painted all the walls black and covered the windows with fiberglass insulation and black sheeting. He stayed there for weeks, talking to no one. He insisted, however, that this was not even remotely worrisome behavior.

"Anyone who knows me pretty well knows I could go through something like that and come through fine," he said later. "I wasn't worried — I was very excited and enthusiastic." [BLENDER]

Michael Adebari/LFI (Michael Jackson); LFI (Abdul); Neal Preston/Corbis (Jackie Jackson); Steven Dewall/Retna Ltd. (Cuomo); Steve Granitz/Wireimage.com (Love); Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)


"The words float like a butterfly;
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Gary Belsky, ESPN magazine

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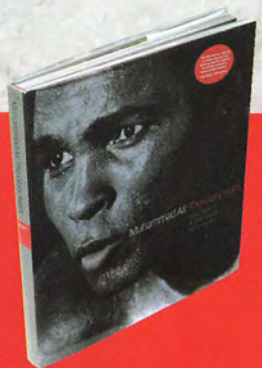

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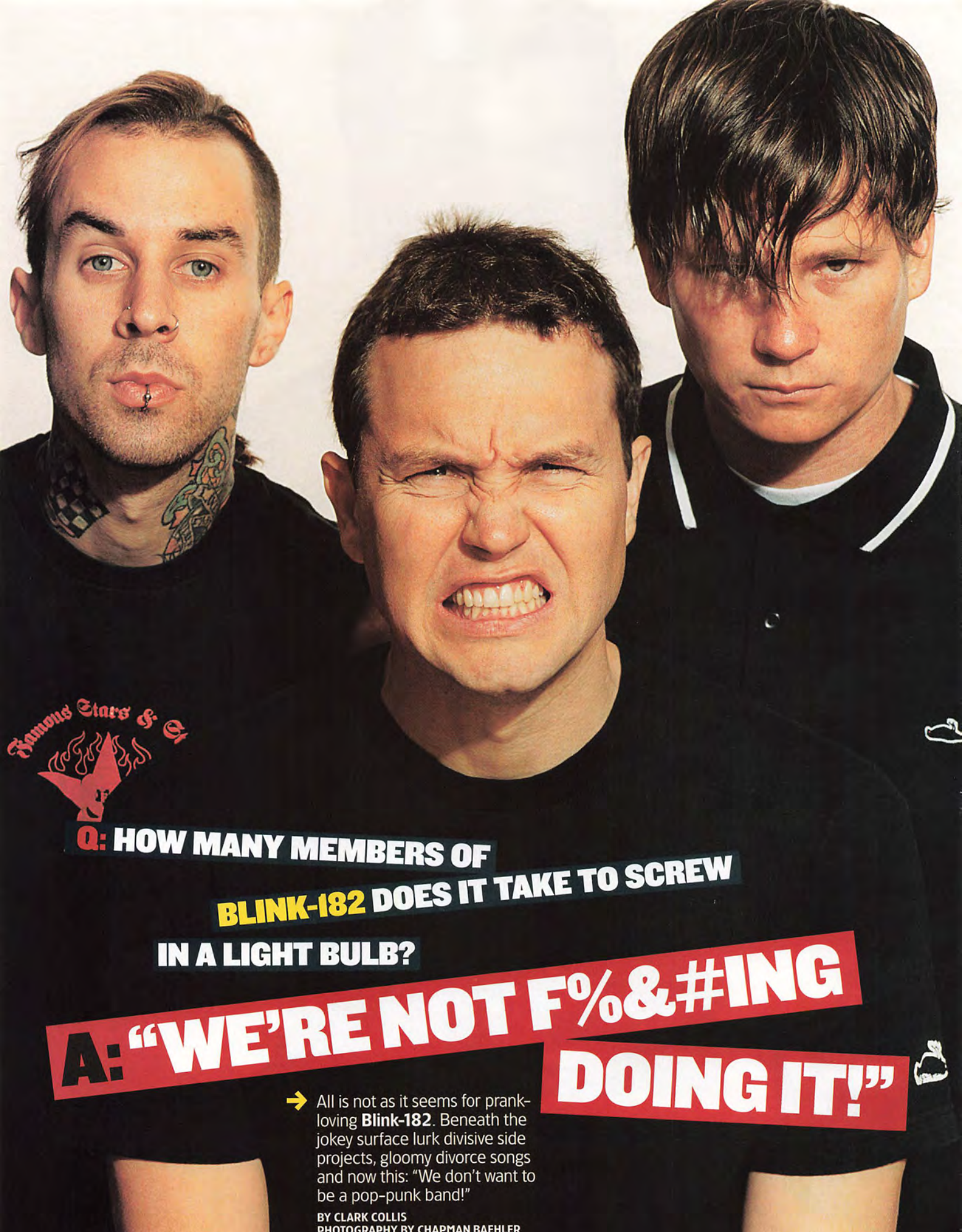


Q: HOW MANY MEMBERS OF BLINK-182 DOES IT TAKE TO SCREW IN A LIGHT BULB?

A: "WE'RE NOT F%&#ING DOING IT!"

All is not as it seems for prank-loving **Blink-182**. Beneath the jokey surface lurk divisive side projects, gloomy divorce songs and now this: "We don't want to be a pop-punk band!"

BY CLARK COLLIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHAPMAN BAEHLER

WHENEVER BLINK-182 singer-bassist Mark Hoppus is asked by his tour manager to do something, he always gives the same response. That response is, "I'm not fucking doing it!"

In the two days *Blender* has so far spent on the road with the trio, it is a phrase the pop-punk icon seems to have used on hundreds of occasions, whether the request is to do yet another phone interview ("I'm not fucking doing it!"), another radio show ("I'm not fucking doing it!") or another meet-and-greet ("I'm not fucking doing it!").

But in the end, the 31-year-old Hoppus always does these things, and cheerfully. He just gets a kick out of razzing people. In fact, the band — Hoppus plus singer-guitarist Tom DeLonge and drummer Travis Barker, both 27 — have well-deserved reputations as practical jokers. Later tonight, when a hotel concierge calls one of the group's management team to tell him that his "escort" is waiting in the lobby, everyone assumes one of the guys in the band hired her.

Yet backstage at the Boston club Avalon, Hoppus suddenly changes tack when he is asked to do a phoner with a Detroit newspaper about the fact that tickets for their forthcoming show in that city are changing hands on eBay for a hefty $300.

"Why don't we let *him* do it?" he asks, nodding toward *Blender* between mouthfuls of cereal. "He knows everything about us by now."

While the grinning Hoppus is eventually talked out of this plan, he does have a point. For the past 48 hours, Blink-182 have allowed *Blender* to follow their every non-restroom-related movement as they embarked on a club tour to promote their new self-titled record. The special cut-rate gigs will also allow fans the chance to experience for just $1 — or $300 on eBay — what it was like to see Blink before they graduated to larger venues in the wake of their multiplatinum 1999 album, *Enema of the State*.

Moreover, it's not as though *Blender* could exactly blacken the band's name any more than, say, DeLonge did at a radio interview yesterday, when he informed the female DJ that he regularly rolls around in feces, has a dog named Fucker and is very good in bed ("It's not a boast — it's just a fact!"). After the DJ attempted to one-up DeLonge by announcing that his voice made her "wet," he laconically replied, "Really? That's just what my mom says."

To be fair to DeLonge, he had warned *Blender* at the start of this adventure how things would be: "We fuck around. We say stupid-ass shit and we do stupid-ass shit. I mean, that's who we are."

They are also, of course, the people who, in the video for "What's My Age Again?", ran bare-ass naked through the streets of Hollywood and who once released a song called "Fuck a Dog" (sample lyric: "We wanna fuck a dog in the ass/We wanna fuck a dog in the ass/We wanna fuck a dog/Fuck you!").

"We spent a lot of time in the studio watching porn."

But they're not *just* those people. Not anymore. True, "Feeling This," the first single off their new album, arrived accompanied by a David LaChappelle–directed video boasting a gaggle of increasingly unclad high-school kids. But the album itself is far more sober, as long on angst and pain and violence as it is short on, say, the desire for canine sex.

Backstage at the 9:30 Club, Washington, D.C.

↑ Travis Barker drums at Avalon in Boston.

Outside TLA in Philadelphia

"In making this record, we wanted to be different," says DeLonge, at once the band's most obviously infantile member and its most thoughtful. "But we couldn't have gotten to this level if we were just a novelty joke band. Some of our fans were probably like, 'Fuck, maybe they should stop joking so people could hear why I like this band.' And I think this record is going to help those kids out."

And obviously, a serious album like this was written in a serious atmosphere. . . .

"Actually, we spent a lot of time in the studio watching porn," DeLonge says. "There's a lot of weird, deep shit on this record, but the recording process was fun. There was laughing and stupidity. For the first month and a half, we had this TV in the control room, and Mark figured out that if you pushed a couple of buttons,

Opposite page: Scarlet Pagoldals, this page: Chapman Baehler (3)

Dignity, always dignity.

TOURING 101 >>>

Longtime vanmates Tom DeLonge and Mark Hoppus offer seven golden rules for surviving life on the road

PLAY PRANKS ON ONE ANOTHER

DELONGE: "The smallest, stupidest things, like short-sheeting somebody's bed, I find the funniest things. Also, if you're standing in line at Starbucks, pretend that one of you has farted really badly. Make a big scene and leave the place, making sure everyone is looking at your friend. Eventually, out of embarrassment, he'll be forced to leave as well."

BRING A COMPUTER . . .

DELONGE: "Who knows when you're going to be sitting in your hotel room and will want to watch some bestiality on the Internet?"

. . . AND A BOOK

DELONGE: "Right now, I'm reading a book about how the State Department threatens national security by doing business with oil-rich nations. Something light is always good."

HOPPUS: "Books and music are also a good way not to have to listen to Tom talk about how JFK was killed because he found out about the military base where they keep the aliens."

DELONGE: "I don't want to talk about that. Except to say that aliens are real — and they are going to kill us."

DON'T WEAR DIRTY UNDERWEAR

DELONGE: "Every time we play a show, we put clean underwear on our rider. In the early days, the underwear situation was a real problem. [*Whispers*] Particularly for Mark."

GIVE YOUR BANDMATES THEIR SPACE

DELONGE: "I know that if Mark's in his bunk with the curtains closed, I shouldn't go in there. Why? For fear of the sin that may be involved."

INSPECT YOUR RIDER

DELONGE: "Sometimes you have some really weird stuff turning up food-wise. Tonight, we had a bag of dates. Who asked for that? Although they would probably be good for Mark's impacted stool."

LOOK AFTER YOURSELF

DELONGE: "Taking vitamins is good. But be careful — if you take too many of them, they'll change the color of your piss. I've got the balance right at the moment, so my piss is a natural bright red." *CLARK COLLIS*

you could rent an adult film. So we would rent them about 10 times a day. After about day 47, you couldn't rent them anymore. We figured that maybe the people who owned the house got the first bill!"

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

"WHO, APART FROM me, feels like he's about to have a fucking heart attack?"

Two hours later, Mark Hoppus has just come offstage, and he isn't joking. Drenched in sweat and out of breath, the bassist looks every inch a man who hasn't been on the road in a while. He also looks disappointed. To the MTV cameraman who is tracking Blink-182's every move for an episode of the network's *Album Launch* series, Hoppus says the band's set tonight, which mixed up new tracks with a clutch of old favorites such as "All the Small Things" and "The Rock Show," was a B-plus. Later, he tells *Blender*, with evident disgust, that it was "a C-plus, maybe a B-minus at best."

"It's so dumb to be 27 years old and go, 'I am still punk!' "
★

Hoppus, it is clear, hates letting down "the kids" (his phrase) with whom the band enjoys a famously strong connection. This link is often attributed to the fact that like many of their fans, they all come from broken homes, a background limned in such songs as the divorce epic "Stay Together for the Kids." Observing the band close up, it's patently clear that the three of them have an intense desire to do right by their following.

At today's sound check, one fan asked DeLonge if he would talk on the phone with his brother, who is stationed in Kuwait. The singer immediately agreed, and by the time he handed the cellphone back, the fan was crying tears of gratitude. Later, *Blender* will accidentally encounter Travis Barker at a Starbucks, happily enduring an impromptu Q&A from a group of fans. ("Got any drumming tips?" "Listen to lots of music." "Are you going to marry your girlfriend?" "I dunno; I love her." "Can I touch your hand?" "Sure.")

"We don't put ourselves on a pedestal," Barker had told *Blender* the day before in the lobby of his New York hotel, appropriately oblivious to actress Famke Janssen, who was sitting at the next table. "We don't put ourselves out of reach."

"We hate all that shit," DeLonge agreed. "We hate bands that think they deserve to be where they are. I don't want to go out and act like an asshole because I'm in a band or because I can afford to break shit. When you do things that feel good, that are right, it's just good karma."

One of those "good things" is this tour, which the guys admit is costing them a small fortune. Another was playing last August to allied troops stationed in the Persian Gulf — a mission of particular importance to DeLonge, whose brother, a Navy lieutenant, served in the recent war in Iraq.

"We got luxury there," DeLonge says, unwinding after the show in Boston. "We ate macaroni and mayonnaise. The troops said, 'We never get food like this.' It's so serious and so gnarly, the conditions are an afterthought after security. The guy who picked us up said, 'There's death everywhere.' He said, 'We don't even want to talk about it — we're just happy to see you guys. You guys remind us of reality. Out here, there's just dirt, heat and dead bodies.' "

"It was," DeLonge concludes, "like we had been to hell."

A signing session, Washington, D.C.

Boston: DeLonge talks to a fan's brother who is stationed in Kuwait

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

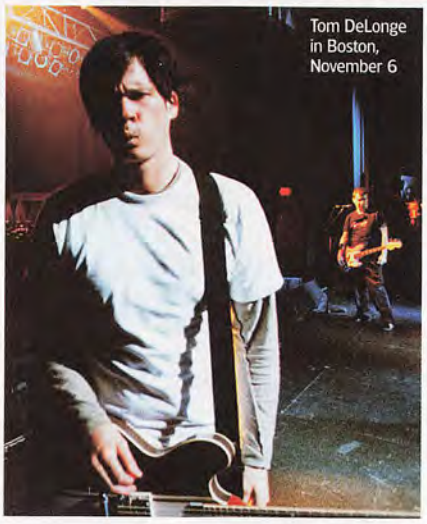
"FARTS!" HOPPUS exclaims upon entering his dressing room before the show in Philadelphia the following day. "This place smells of farts!"

He's not wrong. Yet the room's flatulent odor

David Tazzyman (illustration)

Travis Barker warms up in Boston.

↑ Blink-182 at Irving Plaza in New York, November 9



Tom DeLonge in Boston, November 6

is not its most irritating aspect. That would be the constant pinging noise coming from next door — an electronic metronome indicating that Barker has begun his preshow warm-up assault on a rubber practice drum. The least communicative of the trio when being formally interviewed, the drummer is, in many ways, the most intriguing. Defiantly anti-celebrity, Barker had earlier noted the numerous Blink posters decorating the venue and disgustedly sighed, "I've never seen my face as much as I have on this tour — fuck this shit."

Yet Barker is the man who also owns 11 cars and, just a couple of weeks ago, had a son with Shanna Moakler, a former Miss USA. Despite being a fitness nut, Barker is the band's only real drinker, and he admits that he freshly primped his extravagant mohawk just this morning. Moreover, when he does say something to a journalist, it's usually interesting. Asked by the MTV crew, for example, about why Blink had played in the Persian Gulf, he responded that his father had served in Vietnam and that he had "heard stories," before clamming up again. When *Blender* wondered aloud what Barker would do if he couldn't play the drums anymore, the new father rather terrifyingly announced that he would pay someone to shoot him in the head.

Indeed, in the last year alone, in addition to his Blink duties, Barker played on Pink's new record, released an album with his other band, the Transplants, and a second with his *other* other band, Box Car Racer. Essentially a bleaker, thrashier Blink-182, Box Car also features DeLonge. But not Hoppus.

"That did feel strange," Hoppus says hesitantly. "At the beginning, yeah, it was weird, for sure. Because nobody talked about it. It was this strange situation that nobody addressed. It got to be this weird thing in the band for a while."

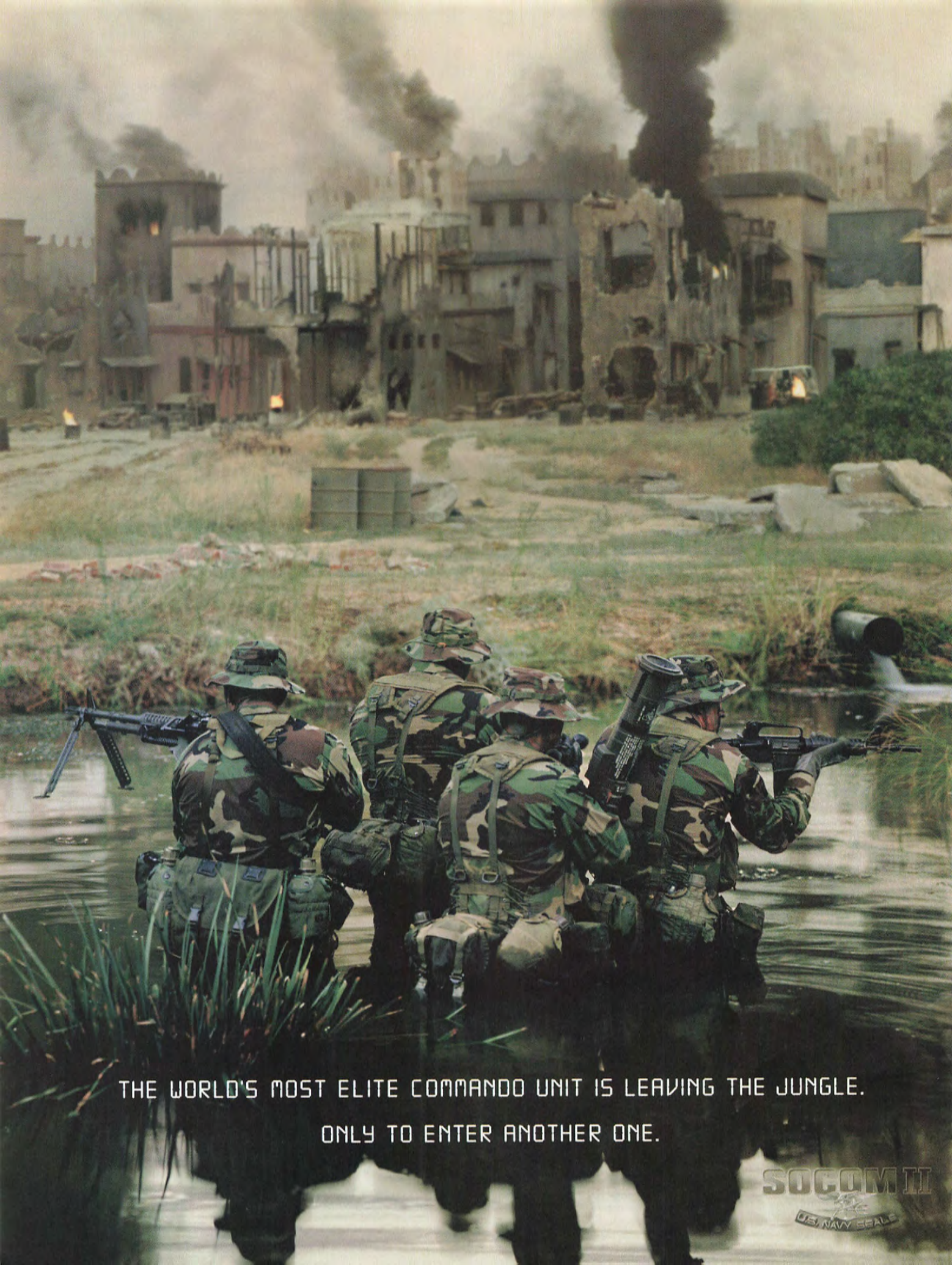
While Hoppus still sounds hurt, he agrees that spending nine months apart had a rejuvenating effect on the band when they reconvened last December to record their new album. They decided to treat this record as if it were their first. Renting a house in San Diego, where both Hoppus and DeLonge live, they spent months trying out new sounds and stripping nearby record stores of CDs by favored bands such as the Who and the Cure, whose frontman, Robert Smith, they successfully wooed to sing on the new song "All of This." Such expensive experimentation, they claim, was encouraged by their new label, Geffen, in whose lap they landed following the effective dissolution of sister company MCA.

"When we were on MCA, it was kind of accounting first, creative second," DeLonge says. "They said, 'We want this record by this time. And if it's not here by this time, we're gonna penalize you X amount of dollars.' It was a huge pissing match. But Geffen came in and said, 'This is the best record you ever made; take as much time as you want.' So we did. We accomplished our goal."

If that goal was an album that expands the band's sonic horizons while rigorously excising their comic lyrical elements, then they undoubtedly did. Notably heart-wrenching is "Go," on which Hoppus describes being locked outside his house as a teenager, hearing "the angry voice of the man inside" and seeing "the look of fear in my mother's eyes." Did the bassist have any concerns about revealing so much in such a specific fashion?

"No, not really," he says. "But it's a personal song. It's very . . . uh . . . I don't know. Has my mother heard it? →

Travis Barker warms up in Washington, D.C.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Playing live in Washington, D.C., November 8

Yeah, but it's not specifically about my mother. It's just, like, kind of a situation. It's kind of like . . . uh . . . I don't know. I feel weird talking about it."

Looking at Hoppus's sad, confused expression, so does *Blender*.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

"I DID A really fucked-up jump earlier on and hurt my back," Hoppus informs the crowd toward the end of tonight's set. "Which of you guys is man enough to give me a massage?"

One of the band's crew had earlier told *Blender* that Hoppus is the key to the band's live show — if he's "up," so is everyone else. This evening, the bassist couldn't be higher as he balances his instrument on the palm of his hand, gleefully throws fistfuls of DeLonge's guitar picks into the crowd and bounces around the stage like a hyperactive 3-year-old.

"I liked that show a lot better," he says afterward. "That was a solid A-minus."

"The new songs seemed to go down well," DeLonge interjects. "We always try our hardest to make the best record we can — but this is different. We don't want to be a pop-punk band. You know, I have PUNK ROCK tattooed on my arm. But you grow out of it. It's so dumb to be 27 years old and go, 'I am still punk!' It doesn't mean anything."

So are the days of the band being as funny on record as they are in person gone for good? Have they passed the point where they would, say, release an EP of novelty songs about masturbation?

"We'd do it only if people completely didn't think it was going to happen," DeLonge says, laughing. "If everyone thought we were the darkest, most serious band in the world, then I'd want to do it. We would need to get to that Radiohead level. Actually, *they* should do it. An EP of masturbation songs by Radiohead would be *awesome*."

↑ Blink-182 fans at the barricades in Philadelphia

With that, he disappears with the rest of the band toward their tour bus for an overnight drive to their next show, in Washington, D.C. As they walk, their tour manager outlines to Hoppus what else the next day will bring: the interviews, the meet-and-greets and so forth.

As the band climbs aboard the bus, the wind carries Hoppus's reply: "I'm not fucking doing it!" [BLENDER]

From left: DeLonge, Barker and Hoppus backstage in Washington, D.C.

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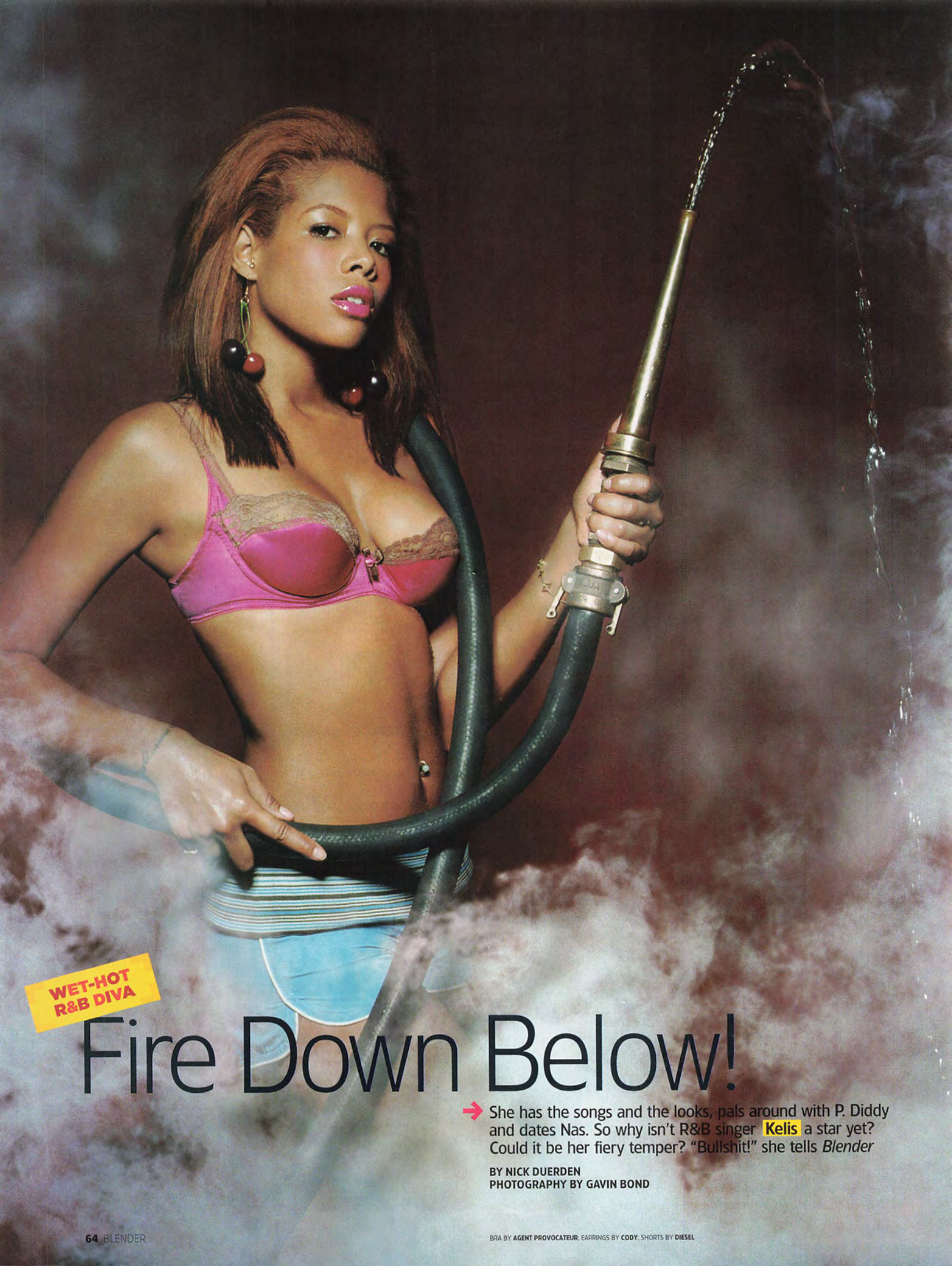


WET-HOT R&B DIVA

Fire Down Below!

She has the songs and the looks, pals around with P. Diddy and dates Nas. So why isn't R&B singer Kelis a star yet? Could it be her fiery temper? "Bullshit!" she tells *Blender*

BY NICK DUERDEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GAVIN BOND

BRA BY **AGENT PROVOCATEUR**, EARRINGS BY **CODY**, SHORTS BY **DIESEL**

THE ORIGINAL intention was not to get killed with Kelis but merely to spend an afternoon with the 24-year-old singer to find out why, exactly, she is one of R&B's more exciting artists right now.

But as we get into a giant Toyota-eating Lincoln 4x4 that she insists on driving, she says this: "I don't think I have ever been as tired as this in my entire life. I can barely see straight." She revs up the engine and lurches into Los Angeles traffic. Horns blare. *Blender* delicately suggests that perhaps she shouldn't be driving in her condition.

"Bullshit!" she barks. "It's the only way I'll stay awake."

Within minutes, we are careening down Sunset Boulevard, Kelis paying little heed to oncoming traffic. Her attentions instead are directed to her cellphone, into which she is having an almighty argument with her record-company boss, Arista CEO LA Reid.

"OK," she tells him bad-temperedly, "but if I'm going to fucking compromise on this kind of shit, then you will have to compromise on some shit with me later down the line. You understand me?" She tosses the phone onto *Blender*'s lap and cuts across several lanes of traffic, burning rubber as she goes and giving other drivers the finger.

"Don't people watch where they're going?" she says. "Man, I hate L.A."

Clearly, we are going to die.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

HALF AN HOUR later, somehow still mercifully alive, we arrive at L.A.'s KISS-FM, the latest stop on her promotional tour. She is here to plug her randy new single, "Milkshake," and her third album, *Tasty*. While her Neptunes-produced music has won her both fans and awards across Europe, in her native U.S. she remains relatively unknown.

The majority of KISS-FM's employees, for example, have never heard of her. They fail to recall her memorable 1999 duet with ODB, "Got Your Money," and have no idea she is engaged to rap superstar Nas. And while her 1999 debut single, "Caught Out There (I Hate You So Much Right Now)," was perhaps the best female-empowerment anthem of that decade, it seems to maintain classic status only across the Atlantic. During the next four hours, as *Blender* nervously trails her across town, nobody will recognize her.

"I'm mostly known in urban circles over here, because that's the way the industry runs in America," she says with a shrug. "The funny thing is, I'm anything but your average urban artist."

Her heroes, she insists, are not Beyoncé and Missy Elliott but Roberta Flack, Annie Lennox and Bonnie Raitt, and she is as likely to rock out as she is to smooch soulfully. *Tasty* is her first album not produced entirely by the Neptunes, and while it occasionally suffers for that, she mostly manages to underline just how wide-ranging she can be. She can do '70s-style consciousness-raising folk ("Everyday Story") as convincingly as odes to alfresco sex ("In Public"), while tracks such as "Sugar Honey Iced Tea" and "Milkshake" are pure sci-fi soul.

SWIMSUIT BY **ROSA CHA**; GALOSHES FROM **KMART**/CUSTOMIZED BY STYLIST

"I can sing, act, dance, make clothes, you name it." ★

"Nobody else does what I can do," is the way she sees it.

She might be right.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

KELIS ROGERS WAS born in Harlem. Her father was a saxophone-playing Pentecostal minister, her mother a children's clothing designer. Their daughter, who attended New York's LaGuardia High School of Music, Art and Performing Arts, was convinced that her future lay in entertainment.

"The creative part of my brain has always been particularly developed," she says. "Performing was what I did best. I can sing, act, dance, make clothes, you name it." She believes she was born to be famous: "It takes very little effort for me to shine."

Such overwhelming confidence quickly paid off. By 18, she had landed a record deal with Virgin, and "Caught Out There" suggested that a star was born. Her 1999 debut album, *Kaleidoscope*, soon took off overseas, and she began to spend a lot of time in London, where British fashion designer Matthew Williamson made her his muse. Her aim for her second album, 2001's *Wanderland*, was to follow no musical map but her own. It worked, but its mishmash of rock and funk confused everybody. Virgin hated it and refused to release it in the U.S. Kelis promptly called in lawyers.

"I'm a very independent person," she says, "and I don't like to justify my music to anybody but myself. That's why I walked."

It took the better part of two years to extricate herself from her contract, but late last year she signed to the Neptunes-owned Star Trak label, an offshoot of Arista. P. Diddy became her manager, and all, at long last, was well. Until she fired him.

"Let's just say," she announces, addressing her cuticles, "that sometimes people make better friends than they do business partners. Me and Puff, we make better friends."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

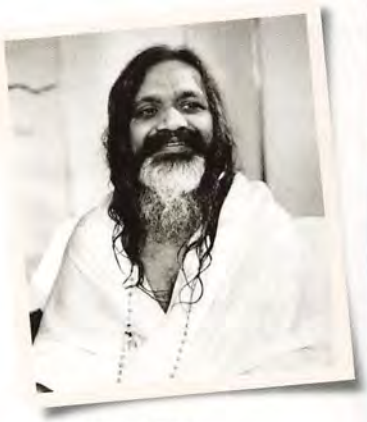
RECENTLY, KELIS and fiancé Nas left New York and the spotlight for the sprawling wilderness of the Georgia countryside. What she wants more and more these days, she suggests, is solitude.

"I'm totally torn with the limelight. Part of me thrives on it, part just wants to escape. And Nas really hates it." She turns to address her manager in the back seat. "Speaking of which, I need to find a tattoo parlor. Find me one."

Phone calls are made, directions taken. Twenty minutes later, Kelis's wrist is under the tattooist's needle. She's getting the outline of a cuddly teddy bear, an *N* for Nas on its swollen belly. She stifles another yawn but gabbles on still.

"There's so much I want to do: act, travel, make music, babies, go to culinary school, take pottery lessons. And I want it all now — *now!* That's my trouble," she says, grinning. "I want to have my cake and eat it, every last damn crumb." [BLENDER]

Alphonse Telymonde (still-lifes, 3) Set design: Dino & Bradley/Judy Casey; styling: John Moore for Aer Reps NYC; makeup: Carolina Gonzalez/Judy Casey; hair: Hector Pocasangre/Phinogenics

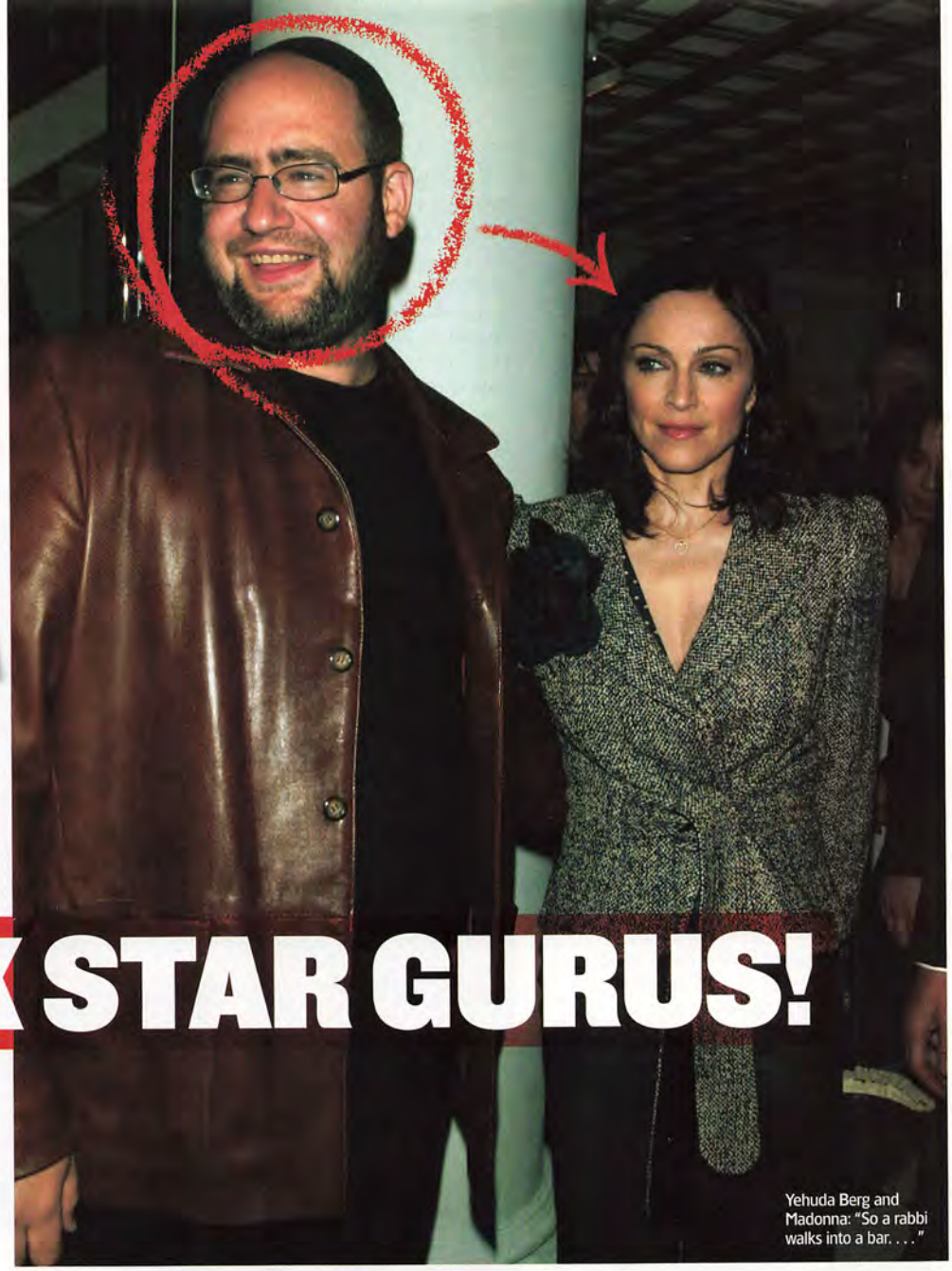


ALIGN YOUR CHAKRAS! IT'S THE...

ROCK STAR GURUS!

Where do rock stars turn when their daily orgy of money, drugs and sex loses its luster? To their crazy spiritual gurus, of course!

BY CLARK COLLIS



Yehuda Berg and Madonna: "So a rabbi walks into a bar. . . ."

HOLLYWEIRD!

MADONNA AND RABBI YEHUDA BERG

THE CONVERSION Despite being described by one journalist as having "all the charisma of an eggplant," Rabbi Yehuda Berg is firmly established as the erstwhile Material Girl's spiritual adviser.

Madonna single-handedly popularized the red thread bracelet associated with the rabbi's L.A.-based Kabbalah Learning Centre, which Yehuda's father, Rabbi Philip Berg — formerly an insurance agent named Feivel Gruberger — assumed control of in 1969. Among other dubious practices, it has been alleged that the center, whose teachings are based on an ancient Jewish text, sold "specially blessed" mineral water to treat cancer.

Undeterred, Madonna consulted the center about how many tracks to put on her 1999 album, *Ray of Light* (13!), and introduced Britney Spears to what the onetime Catholic-school student calls "the punk rock of spiritual philosophy."

Madonna introduced Britney Spears to Kabbalah.

OUR EXPERTS SAY "Madonna has not only donated a great deal of money [to the center]," says Rick Ross, a cults scholar, "but she's been a real draw for other celebrities."

FREAKOMETER 3

HAIR-RAISING!

ELVIS PRESLEY AND HIS HAIRDRESSER

THE CONVERSION Elvis Presley instantly connected with metaphysically minded Larry Geller after the 24-year-old came by to trim Presley's fringe in April 1964.

Elvis Presley and Larry Geller: "Thankyouverymuch, God!"

"You're a strange cat for a barber!" the King declared. The next day, Geller returned with a number of spiritual texts, which Elvis eagerly devoured.

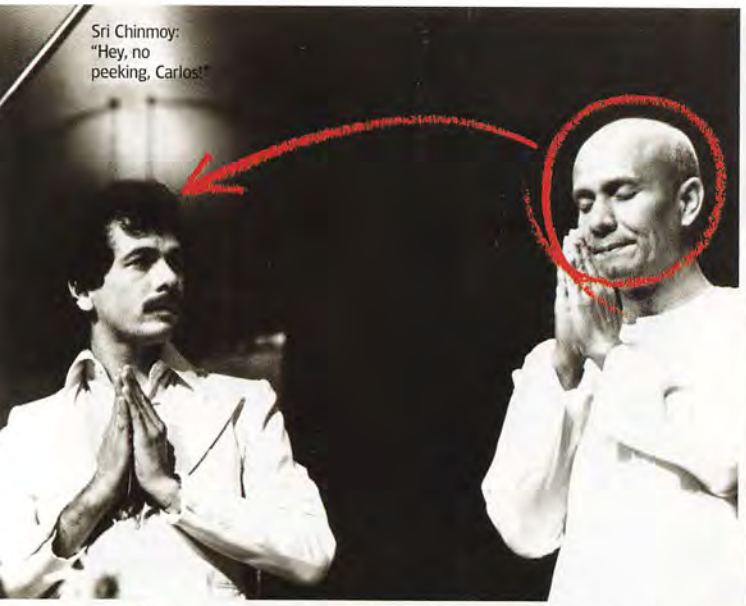
With Geller invited to join Presley's inner circle, the singer became celibate, telling his sex-starved wife, Priscilla, that he was "going through a cleansing period, physically and spiritually."

While driving with Geller in Arizona, Presley claimed to have seen Joseph Stalin's face in a cloud — which then turned into the face of Christ. Loyal to the end, Geller cut the hair of Presley's corpse in preparation for his funeral.

OUR EXPERTS SAY "Elvis was a very soulful guy," Geller says now. "He wanted to know, 'Why me?' "

FREAKOMETER 2

Peter Stemmler (Jesus and Manson illustrations throughout). Clockwise from top left: AP Wide World, Zuma Press, courtesy of Larry Geller


Sri Chinmoy: "Hey, no peeking, Carlos!"

NO FUN!

CARLOS SANTANA AND SRI CHINMOY

THE CONVERSION Santana was introduced to Indian guru Chinmoy in the early '70s by jazz-rock guitarist John McLaughlin. "At the time I got into Sri Chinmoy, everyone was dying," Santana later recalled. "And I felt it was either put junk in my veins or fold my hands and give myself to the Lord."

Chinmoy gave the guitarist a new name, Devadip. But by the end of the '70s, Santana was tiring of his guru's abstemious rules, a regime he referred to as "the West Point approach to spirituality." "It wasn't an easy split," Santana told *Blender* last year. "He was putting pressure on us, saying, 'You'll drown in a sea of darkness.' I learned a lot from him, but everything that was honey turned into vinegar."

By the late '70s, Santana was tired of the guru's rules.

OUR EXPERTS SAY "Carlos Santana was with Sri Chinmoy for years, and eventually he said that he thought he was full of shit," Ross says. "But it caused a certain amount of unhappiness in his life and tension in his marriage."

FREAKOMETER 6

Left: Presley (in red) at a Scientology-backed rally; below: L. Ron Hubbard

BLINDED BY SCIENTOLOGY!

LISA MARIE PRESLEY AND L. RON HUBBARD

THE CONVERSION Elvis Presley listened to his hairdresser, but he was not a fan of Scientology, the religion founded by L. Ron Hubbard, a pulp sci-fi writer–turned–religious guru. "Fuck those people!" the King once declared. "They're just after my money and my name."

Ironically, they eventually got his name — and perhaps a fair amount of his money — thanks to his daughter, Lisa Marie. "Were it not for Scientology," she writes on the What Is Scientology? Web site, "I would be completely insane or dead by now." Other musical Scientologists include Isaac Hayes, Edgar Winter and Mr. Big bassist Billy Sheehan.

OUR EXPERTS SAY "Lisa Marie Presley's recent career launch can be seen in part as carefully orchestrated by Scientology," Ross says. "The title track of her album ['To Whom It May Concern,' which cautions against giving psychiatric drugs to kids] has directly to do with Scientology, which is critical of psychiatric drugs and psychiatrists."

FREAKOMETER 8

STAIRWAY TO SATAN!

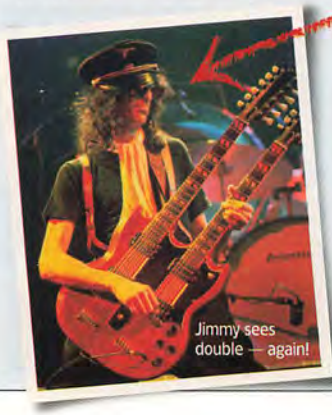
JIMMY PAGE AND ALEISTER CROWLEY

THE CONVERSION Crowley behaved like a rock star decades before the concept was invented. His personal philosophy? "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law." Apparently, this involved becoming a heroin addict, declaring himself a god and screwing anything that moved (or didn't move — Crowley claimed that he once had sex with a tree in Burma).

Fellow chemical dustbin and sexual adventurer Jimmy Page became a devotee of the self-styled "wickedest man on earth" during Led Zeppelin's heyday, collecting Crowley artifacts and buying his old house on the banks of Loch Ness.

OUR EXPERTS SAY "Crowley once did a ritual where he named a frog Jesus and crucified it, but he wasn't a Satanist per se," author Michael Moynihan says. "His polemics shared more with Tantric beliefs."

FREAKOMETER 9


Jimmy sees double — again!

Aleister Crowley *hated* his Christmas present.

Clockwise from top left: Michael Ochs Archives.com; Bergsaker Tore/Corbis Sygma; Bettmann/Corbis (2); Neal Preston/Corbis

ARE YOU A CRAZY RELIGIOUS GURU?

Probably not. But here's a quiz, just to make sure

1 Your worshippers instantly recognize one another by . . .

a) Their overwhelming serenity.
b) The "blessed" jewelry they're forced to purchase from your gift shop.
c) Their oversize cup of poisoned lemonade.

2 How many times a week do you have sex?

a) None. Your belief system precludes you from having sexual congress.
b) Forty-seven. Your belief system precludes you from having sexual congress with anyone but underage girls.
c) One hundred thirteen. Your belief system precludes you from having sexual congress with anyone but goats.

3 When one of your congregation becomes sick, what do you do?

a) Pray for him while he goes to see a doctor.
b) Pray for him after you ban him from seeing a doctor.
c) Start sharpening your sacrificial knife.

4 Why is it important to attract as many rich and famous followers as possible?

a) Because they can more effectively spread knowledge of your belief system.
b) Because someone has to pay for your fleet of Rolls-Royces.
c) Because someone has to pay for all the poisoned lemonade, sacrificial knives and goats.

IF YOU ANSWERED . . .

MOSTLY A): Congratulations! You are a genuine religious guru.

MOSTLY B): Congratulations! You are a fake religious guru.

MOSTLY C): Congratulations! You are a crazy religious guru. And you smell of goat.

PURE EVIL!

JEREMY SPENCER AND THE CHILDREN OF GOD

THE CONVERSION In Los Angeles in February 1971, while still recovering from the effects of a mescaline trip, Fleetwood Mac slide guitarist Jeremy Spencer informed the band that he was going out to a bookstore on Hollywood Boulevard. He never returned.

Days later, he was found at the headquarters of neo-Christian cult the Children of God. "When we finally found him," said Fleetwood Mac's Christine McVie, "he was surrounded by about 400 kids chanting prayers." Spencer, who now answered only to the name Jonathan, refused to rejoin the band, and he remains a member of the cult to this day.

OUR EXPERTS SAY "The Children of God is a horrible, horrible cult," Ross says. "The founder, Moses David Berg, was, by numerous accounts, a pedophile. I've talked with people who grew up in that group, and I can't begin to tell you about the trauma they've had to deal with."

FREAKOMETER 10

Children of God founder Moses David Berg (inset); Jeremy Spencer (far right)

DEVILISH!

METAL BANDS AND SATAN

THE CONVERSION "How can people accuse me of conjuring up the devil?" Ozzy Osbourne once complained. "I have enough trouble conjuring myself out of bed." In fact, it wasn't until the '80s that the Horned One was embraced by metal bands from the U.K.'s Venom to Florida's Deicide, whose frontman, Glen Benton, had an inverted cross branded on his forehead.

Meanwhile, the Norwegian black-metal scene made headlines worldwide following a spate of church burnings and the fatal 1993 stabbing of Mayhem frontman Euronymous by Count Grishnackh, of the band Burzum. On a lighter note, fans of Brit metal act Cradle of Filth were once arrested for wearing the band's JESUS IS A CUNT T-shirt.

OUR EXPERTS SAY "Burzum's Count Grishnackh is quite charming," Moynihan says, "but he showed no remorse for the murder."

FREAKOMETER 9

GURUS WITH ATTITUDE!

BUSTA RHYMES AND THE FIVE PERCENT NATION

THE CONVERSION An offshoot of the Nation of Islam, the Five Percent Nation teaches that the black man is God on earth. This probably explains why the hip-hop community has embraced it more enthusiastically than, say, the country-music community.

Rap's most famous adherent is Busta Rhymes, who in February 2002 announced, "Five Percenters recognize themselves as gods who are in control of their own universe. The 85 percent of the majority of the planet just don't know a lot of the truth. And the other 10 percent are the powers that be. But as one of the 5 percent of poor righteous teachers, I know the truth."

Busta awaits apocalypse, lunch.

Harlem's Five Percent youth center

Rhymes's outburst was a rare thing — followers are not usually keen to discuss the subject, because, as Five Percenter RZA has pointed out, "then 'they' don't know what we be planning."

OUR EXPERTS SAY "Cults often don't want to discuss what they're really about," Ross notes, "because that scares off potential new recruits."

FREAKOMETER 3

David Tazzyman (illustration), Michael Ochs Archives.com (Fleetwood Mac); Sarah Cullen (Five Percent Youth Center); Mark Mainz/Retna Ltd. (Rhymes)

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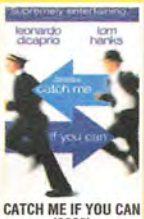

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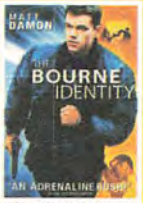

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John, Paul, George and, um, Mahesh

THE ORIGINAL!

THE BEATLES AND MAHARISHI MAHESH YOGI

THE CONVERSION The Fab Four decamped to the Maharishi's Indian ashram in the winter of 1968 to attend a Transcendental Meditation teachers' course. Ringo Starr left first, complaining about the food, followed by Paul McCartney. After allegations emerged that the guru had been "indiscreet" with a young girl, John Lennon declared, "He's just a bloody old letch. What the fuck, we can't go following that!"

> "He's a bloody old letch."
> JOHN LENNON, ON THE MAHARISHI

Despite these holistic hiccups, George Harrison remained a devotee until his death, while Paul McCartney says that during his spell in a Japanese jail after being arrested for drug possession, the Maharishi's mantra "came in handy."

OUR EXPERTS SAY "The Beatles were the vanguard of this whole phenomenon," Ross says. "When Maharishi became involved with them, it catapulted him into the spotlight, which he then turned into a spiritual and financial empire rumored to be worth $3 billion."

FREAKOMETER 6

OUR EXPERTS

LARRY GELLER
Elvis Presley's multitasking hairstylist and guru. His new book, *GellerCare: Healthy Hair, Healthy Life,* will be released in 2004.

RICK ROSS
Executive director of the Ross Institute for the Study of Destructive Cults, Controversial Groups and Movements

MICHAEL MOYNIHAN
Coauthor of the recently updated *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Underground*

Charles Manson regrets killing his barber.

FREAKIEST GURU!

BAD VIBRATIONS!

DENNIS WILSON AND CHARLES MANSON

THE CONVERSION The Beach Boys' drummer was introduced to Manson in the spring of 1968 and became entranced by his tales of the forthcoming apocalyptic race war. Wilson frequently hosted orgies at his house after he invited Manson, the pimp-turned-philosopher, and his "family" to move in. On several occasions, Wilson took them to his doctor for penicillin shots (Wilson: "It was the largest gonorrhea bill in history").

An adaptation of one of Manson's songs, "Cease to Exist," appeared as "Never Learn Not to Love" on the Beach Boys' *20/20.* After Manson pulled a knife on Wilson, the Beach Boy moved out. In August 1969, the Manson Family murdered seven people, including director Roman Polanski's pregnant wife, Sharon Tate.

Following Manson's subsequent incarceration, Wilson declared him a "sick fuck" and remained terrified of his onetime guru for years.

OUR EXPERTS SAY "I worked with celebrities before Elvis," Geller says, "and a lot of them are very insecure. They can be easily led astray by more dominant people." [BLENDER]

FREAKOMETER 10

From top: Hulton Getty Archive; Bettmann/Corbis; Michael Putland/Retna Ltd.

REPORT FROM THE ROCK & ROLL FRONTLINE

The Long, Slow

He was the gifted heir to Kurt Cobain's songwriting legacy. He was an Oscar-nominated musician with five influential albums to his name. So why did he apparently plunge a steak knife into his chest in October? *Blender* unravels the tragic tale of a troubled star. . . .

BY ARIEL LEVY

IT HAS BEEN one week since Elliott Smith, the singer-songwriter and cult hero to the melancholy, died from a single stab wound to his chest. At the place where Sunset Boulevard curves into the Silverlake neighborhood of Los Angeles, a shrine has been set up in front of the swirly blue-and-red mural where Smith posed for the cover of his fifth album, 2000's *Figure 8*. There are flowers and candles, a loaf of bread, elaborate collages of Smith's picture, empty bottles of beer and laminated letters that quote from his lyrics: "Drink up, baby, look at the stars." Fans have scrawled their own epitaphs on the painted wall, too: IT WASN'T MUSIC AS MUCH AS MEDICINE.

In his 34 years, Smith made five revered albums of wounded folk-punk, achieving the kind of religiously devoted following specifically reserved for doomed, tragic/romantic musicians such as Nick Drake, Jeff Buckley and Kurt Cobain. With his bad skin, greasy hair, apologetic slouch and dark eyes, Smith was a poster boy for lovelorn bohemians. The musician Mary Lou Lord, Smith's friend and a onetime girlfriend of Cobain's, says, "I think when Kurt died, Elliott kind of picked up the torch. He put the cool back in folk. He adored punk music, and he was attracted to that darker element. The fans were so adoring — the sad kids."

"When Kurt died, Elliott picked up the torch."
MUSICIAN MARY LOU LORD

Now there is another, more sinister kind of admiration out there for Smith: Above a wilting bouquet of chrysanthemums, someone has written on the painted wall: I THOUGHT IT WAS VERY COOL THE WAY YOU STABBED YOURSELF WITH A STEAK KNIFE. VERY COOL INDEED.

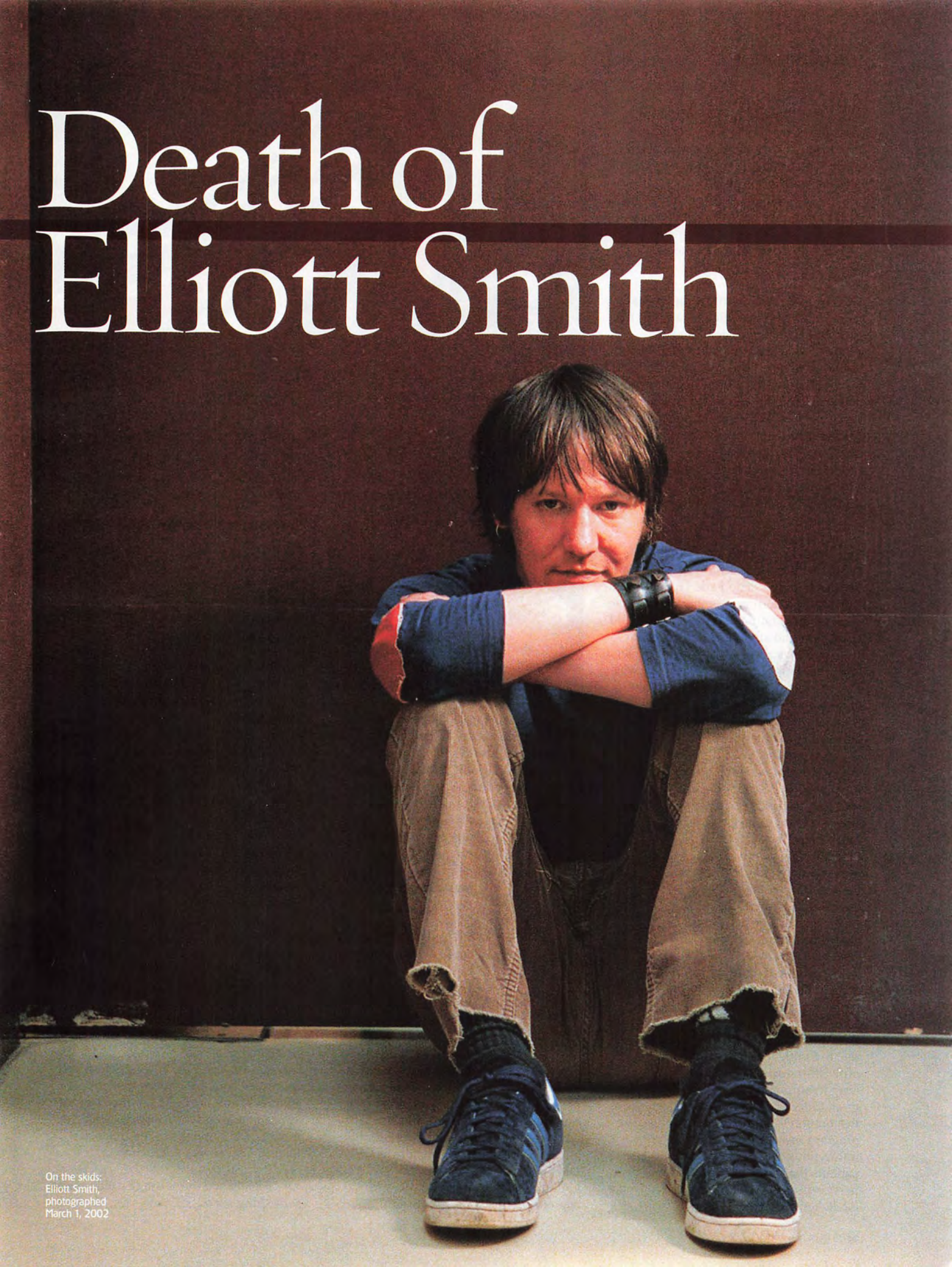
"The best suicide I ever heard of," an emotional Courtney Love told *Blender*.

Smith often said in interviews that he resented being reduced to "the depressed guy." What happened on October 21 is not going to change that reputation. According to the Los Angeles county coroner's office, Smith was found bleeding and barely coherent by his girlfriend, Jennifer Chiba, at around noon in their one-story house on Lemoyne Street in the city's Echo Park neighborhood. He was taken by ambulance to the County-USC Medical Center, where he died an hour later.

It has been widely reported that Smith committed suicide, but the LAPD still has an investigation pending, and the coroner's office will not offer a cause of death until it has the results of toxicology tests. But no evidence of forced entry was found, and according to experts, stabbing yourself in the heart, as gothic as it sounds, is neither uncommon nor difficult: "You just turn the knife sideways and get between the ribs," says Howard Zonana, professor of psychiatry at the Yale University School of Medicine. It seems a horrifying way to go — more brutally murdering yourself than simply killing yourself — but "people who commit suicide in this manner may not be interested in the most painless way to kill themselves," Dr. Zonana says. "The dominant motive is to die."

In a week spent talking to dozens of Smith's friends and peers in order to retrace the trail of despair that led to his gruesome death, many of those closest to him tell *Blender* that they're devastated by his suicide but not shocked; some say they expected to get a call about Smith's suicide long ago. But others are not so sure. "I don't believe the guy stabbed himself in the chest; it just doesn't add up," says Mark Flanagan, a friend of Smith's and the owner of Largo, a popular music club in West Hollywood where he frequently →

Death of Elliott Smith



On the skids: Elliott Smith, photographed March 1, 2002

performed. "I wouldn't be surprised if someone else did this. He was doing drugs with lowlife scum. He was around a lot of creepy people — some very negative, dangerous people.

"He told me many times that he would never commit suicide," Flanagan continues. "But then, he told me he wouldn't do crack. And then he did."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

SMITH HAD BEEN struggling for many years with a heroin addiction, and for his entire life with depression. He had admitted to being a "bad alcoholic," and friends say he had become an expert on psychopharmacology from negotiating so many different antidepressants. He was a gypsy — "I guess I've pared down my stuff over time to things I can easily move," he told a journalist in 2000 — and left in his wake friends and bartenders across Portland, Oregon; Brooklyn, New York; and most recently Los Angeles.

For the last few years of his life, Smith had been moving back and forth between a Silverlake cabin and Jennifer Chiba's home in Echo Park. He had been with Chiba, a former member of the indie band Happy Ending, for about a year, and among the sad aftershocks of his death are rumblings among his friends and fellow musicians about her culpability. Was she the noble, long-suffering caretaker or the evil enabler? Was she Courtney to his Kurt, as some inevitably put it? (Chiba declined to be interviewed for this story.)

In any event, these were extremely difficult times for Smith. His Silverlake neighbors told *Blender* that they would spot him from time to time walking the streets with a blanket over his shoulders, muttering. He was performing less and less; when he did play, the results were frequently disastrous. "It was just so sad to see a guy who couldn't remember his own lyrics," said one fan.

But he had been trying to get it together. After several failed attempts at traditional rehab, Smith admitted himself in 2002 to a drug treatment program called the Neurotransmitter Restoration Center in Beverly Hills. The program involves administering an intravenous drip of amino acids to patients that "kick all the shit out of your nerve receptors," as Smith put it to *Under the Radar* magazine in January 2003, the last interview he gave before his death.

"He had a hard time with relationships. He had a hard time with depression. He had a hard time with, you know, remembering to take a shower."
PRODUCER LARRY CRANE
★

Some friends say he had kicked drugs by the end of his life. "He was incredibly optimistic and healthy at the end, and I know he was clean," says Luke Wood, who signed Smith to DreamWorks. Many others say he hadn't. But most say it doesn't matter either way: Elliott Smith's demons were stronger than any chemical.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

THE SONG THAT made Elliott Smith famous was "Miss Misery," a track from the film *Good Will Hunting* that was nominated for an Academy Award in 1998. Smith devotees relish the memory of his stark performance in a white suit at the Oscars ceremony that year: a shy and shaggy crooner alone under the lights with his guitar in the unlikely company of Céline Dion and Michael Bolton. "He said it was kind of fun," says Larry Crane, who coproduced the song with Smith.

Wall of death: The makeshift shrine to Smith on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles

← Mr. Smith goes to Hollywood: The surreal 1998 Academy Awards performance of "Miss Misery"

Crane is sitting by his mixing board at Jackpot! Recording Studio in Portland, Oregon, a place Smith helped him build in 1997. The used piano Smith bought for them still sits in the corner of the room; he played it on "Miss Misery" and on a few of the songs from 1998's *XO*, his first album released by DreamWorks and his biggest seller, at 225,000 copies.

By unanimous account, Smith had a lifelong suspicion of all things mainstream. He was born Steven Paul Smith on August 6, 1969, but changed his name to Elliott when he was in high school because he found his alliterative given name too "jockish." He moved to Portland when he was 14 after spending his childhood in Dallas with his mother, stepfather and two half-siblings. "He moved to Portland to live with his dad because he didn't like his stepdad or Texas," Crane says.

Smith was a National Merit Scholar at Portland's Lincoln High School and went on to attend Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, a funky little liberal-arts school famous for its lack of course requirements. There, he met Neil Gust, with whom he moved back to Portland after graduation and formed the hardcore band Heatmiser along with bassist Sam Coomes, now in Quasi, and drummer Tony Lash. They made three albums before breaking up in 1996, but Smith had been recording his own material for some time. His first solo CD, *Roman Candle*, was released to critical acclaim in 1994.

"I really had the sense that Elliott was something special," Crane says. The two

Opening spread: Sam Harris/Camera Press/Retna Ltd. This page, from top: Ted Soqui; Susan Sterner/AP Wideworld

became close, spending 12-hour days recording. Smith would usually play every instrument on every track. His girlfriend at the time, Joanna Bolme, who currently plays bass with Stephen Malkmus, worked as a coproducer on many songs.

"It got to the point where I'd be in here working with Joanna, and I wouldn't know if she was dating him or not," Crane says. "And I wouldn't ask. He had a hard time with relationships. He had a hard time with depression. He had a hard time with, you know, remembering to take a fucking shower. One day we're sitting here and I'm thinking, 'God, he smells,' and he's like, 'I'm sorry, man — I forgot to shower.' He just got so focused on his music."

Like many of Smith's friends, Crane says he had lost contact of late. "He was really bad at staying in touch. I talked to him about a year and a half ago and he was real paranoid; he was talking about the deal with DreamWorks and saying people owed him money. Which could be true, but he seemed kind of . . . nutty."

Recently, however, Crane had gotten a call from Jennifer Chiba asking if he'd come to L.A. to work on new material with Smith. "He had tried to kill himself before. He showed me a bad scar on his chest," says Crane, who recently hosted a wake for Smith's family and friends in his backyard. "But people told me he'd been doing better. His father said he'd been calling regularly. So I was really excited to spend time with him and Jennifer." He pauses. "I still have the plane ticket."

If Silverlake embodied the new Elliott Smith — full of hipsters and drug dealers, vintage clothing stores and pawn shops — Smith's ghost is still a visceral presence in the laid-back, tightly knit, music-obsessed Portland community he left behind five years ago. Crane takes *Blender* to the Ash Street Saloon in downtown Portland to watch Smith's former roommate Sean Crogan play a loud, raging indie-rock set for a crowd of about 50 people, most of them sporting hooded sweatshirts and smoking cigarettes.

After his set, Crogan heads for a table near the pinball machines and sits down next to his father, a tough, white-haired man with an earring and a black leather jacket. The Crogan men would often spend time with Smith and his father, Gary. "Gary and Elliott were a lot alike," Crogan says. "They look the same, they talk the same, they have the same kind of humor, they're both incredibly intelligent people. I wouldn't be surprised if his dad has depression problems, too. He's a psychiatrist. And he's a mess right now." (Gary Smith declined to be interviewed.)

Smith (right) with Sean Crogan in California, 1995

↑ In memoriam: Above, Beck performs at a tribute to Smith at L.A.'s Henry Fonda Theater; far left, Smith at the same venue months earlier

Crogan lived with Smith for three years, during which time they played a lot of music, drank a lot of beer, read Russian novels and watched cable television. "We were both total depression junkies: We were addicted to being depressed. We were the doomsday brothers," Crogan says, adjusting his wool ski cap and lighting a cigarette. "We would go out together and sit at the bar and cry. A lot. Young Man's Disease — that's what Elliott's dad called it."

"When Elliott moved away, he said, 'This might be the last time we talk, because I'm probably going to kill myself.' "
FORMER ROOMMATE SEAN CROGAN

Like Crane, Crogan says he tried hard to stay in touch with Smith after Smith moved to Brooklyn in the late '90s, but he found it almost impossible. "The last couple of times he called me, he was strung out on all these antidepressants. I saw the medicine chest he was carrying around with him." Crogan says that although they drank a lot together, Smith was not using hard drugs until after he moved out of Oregon. (Heroin, however, is easy to come by in Portland; *Blender* was offered it three times within an hour of arriving in town.)

Without the cocoon of his Portland friends as insulation, things got worse for Smith. "We tried an intervention," says Mary Lou Lord. "It was '98 or '99, and we all met in Chicago and told Elliott we thought he had a problem. But we all had fucking problems, and who were we?" She laughs in a way that suggests little about this is funny to her.

Crogan says he'd been fearing and grieving Smith's death for years before it actually occurred. "When he moved away, he said, 'I'll probably never, ever see you again. This might be the last time we talk, because I'm probably going to kill myself.' He said that to everyone, to his family, his friends," he says. "I last spoke to him a year ago. He was supersick and suffering from hallucinations. He wouldn't know where he was, and he was scared all the time that people were following him. We did a tour with him in '99, and pretty much every time after that he was strung out or in rehab or just bonkers. He was terrified of people →

Clockwise from top left: Ted Soqui (2); Tammy Watson

coming to get him. I think he had some bad experiences growing up in Texas — I mean, I know he did — but I don't feel I have the right to talk about any of that."

Several of Smith's friends told *Blender* that he had openly discussed being abused as a child. He revealed to *Under the Radar* that his upbringing "wasn't good, but that's been worked out between me and the person, and they don't need to feel bad about it forever." In 2000, he created the Elliott Smith Foundation for Abused Children, and he had planned to donate the profits from his new album-in-progress to it.

Smith had been working with engineer David McConnell on that double album, tentatively titled *From a Basement on the Hill*, a reference to McConnell's hilltop studio in Malibu. "He wanted a certain sound for this record," McConnell says. "We had a term for it — we called it the California Frown. A lot of these big-shot producers go for what they call the California Smile — high highs and low lows, and very slick. He was scared of slick. He'd had it on his past couple of records, and he wanted to get back to a raw sound."

Did it appear that he was using drugs?

"I think drugs probably were still a problem for Elliott," McConnell answers, "but music was his escape."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

SMITH'S SISTER, Ashley Welch, stands onstage at the Henry Fonda Theater in L.A. in an orange T-shirt and baggy pants. Beck, Beth Orton, Rilo Kiley and others have gathered for a musical tribute to Smith 13 days after his suicide. Welch tells the audience how Smith used to slip $100 bills into homeless men's shoes. With her shaggy brown hair and big, dark eyes, she looks very much like her brother, who she later describes to *Blender* as "the best brother I could have hoped for, the best person I ever met." She turned 25 last week. Her sweet face twists as she says that it was "not a great birthday."

↑ Above, Smith at Jackpot! Studio, 1997; left, Smith (second from left) in Heatmiser, 1993

Downstairs, Beck, who lives in Smith's neighborhood, is sitting with his guitar in a tiny white dressing room. "We did a tour together once, and he'd come over sometimes," he says. "He was very thoughtful and soft-spoken. It's so weird he's gone." A few minutes later, Beck takes the stage and gives a beautiful performance of Smith's "Alameda," a song Smith couldn't get through when he recently tried to perform it in this same theater.

Several of Smith's friends told *Blender* that he had openly discussed being abused as a child. ★

"People told us he had it back: He could play! He could sing! So we went to the Fonda to hear him," Largo's Mark Flanagan says. "But he was doing 'Alameda,' and he couldn't remember it. I just found myself crying." He hadn't spoken to Smith since Valentine's Day 2001.

One by one, Smith seems to have pulled away from nearly everyone who was close to him, but they are all gathering around his memory now. The evening ends with *Strange Parallel*, a short film about Smith in which filmmaker Steve Hanft searches for him in Portland, New York and Los Angeles.

"Elliott was hard to find," Hanft says later. "He kept telling us the wrong places to meet him." There's a shot of Smith's favorite bartender at a dive on New York's Lower East Side, and one of Larry Crane at Jackpot! saying, "They always call here looking for him — friends, management, the record company. But he isn't here."

Once Hanft finally got ahold of Smith, he filmed him sitting in the woods, playing his guitar and repeatedly singing the lines, "I'm never gonna know you now/But I'm gonna love you anyhow." [BLENDER]

ELLIOTT SMITH HIS LIFE IN CDs

ROMAN CANDLE
CAVITY SEARCH, 1994
★★

Recorded on a basement four-track and released on a tiny Portland, Oregon, indie label, Smith's debut is a diary-like footnote in the early-'90s lo-fi singer-songwriter trend. Features four songs called "No Name."

ELLIOTT SMITH
KILL ROCK STARS, 1995
★★★★

His "heroin album" (featuring "The White Lady Loves You More" and "Needle in the Hay"), Smith's second effort is only slightly more hi-fi but holds its own alongside records by Neil Young and Lou Reed as one of music's great documents of addiction.

EITHER/OR
KILL ROCK STARS, 1997
★★★★★

More various and confident than the folkie melancholia of previous outings, *Either/Or* ended up in the dorm rooms of artsy college kids everywhere. Named, appropriately, after a philosophy text by Søren Kierkegaard. An instant classic.

XO
DREAMWORKS, 1998
★★★

In '97, six of Smith's songs appeared on the *Good Will Hunting* soundtrack. One, "Miss Misery," was nominated for an Oscar, leading to a major-label contract. A bigger budget meant bigger arrangements and bright-eyed moments that are downright Beatlesque.

FIGURE 8
DREAMWORKS, 2000
★★★★

Mysteriously, his last public document was his most upbeat. Partially recorded at London's Abbey Road, it's filled with swinging pop tempos, multilayered harmonies and ornate keyboard parts, and even includes a song called "Happiness."

ALEC HANLEY BEMIS

Larry Crane (Smith, top); J.J. Gonson/Frontier Records (Heatmiser); S.I.N./Corbis (Smith, bottom)

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"Let's Build a Beer Bong!"

The Offspring prove that you don't need scientific know-how and a lot of *Blender*'s cash to make the ultimate alcohol-delivery system. But it helps!

BY CLARK COLLIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TED SOQUI

"YOU WANT A tube large enough to facilitate the swift transportation of liquid," declares the Offspring's lead singer, Dexter Holland, waving a substantial piece of industrial hose in *Blender*'s face. "But it's got to be narrow enough to get your thumb around. I recommend one-inch diameter."

As he plunges the tube into a pan of boiling water in the kitchen of guitarist Noodles's Orange County, California, rehearsal studio, Holland looks every inch a man who, as well as having sold 32 million albums' worth of SoCal punk rock, can claim a doctorate in molecular biology. Nor is the mad-scientist vibe dispelled by the bespectacled, elegantly graying figure of Noodles (Kevin Wasserman), who has joined his singer in an animated discussion of whether the addition of a hose clamp would ruin their project's "sleek, aesthetically pleasing lines."

"As you can see," Holland says, grinning, "we take our beer bong–making very seriously."

Yes, given almost a grand to spend on whatever they desire, Holland and Noodles have elected to make a beer bong. (The Offspring's bassist, Greg Kriesel, and new drummer, Atom Willard, are absent following a hard day's rehearsing.) Total cost of the raw materials? Twelve dollars. Well, $12 plus the liquid contents of Noodles's fridge.

"It tastes so good when it hits the lips!" Holland cries, quoting Will Ferrell's *Old School* character, after the evening's first beer has shot directly from plastic funnel to rock-star stomach. Next up is Noodles ("I had only nine beers last night, so I'm ready to party!") and then *Blender*, until tonight a beer-bong virgin. The experience, we're alarmed to discover, is like having someone empty a fire extinguisher directly into your esophagus.

"We used to do beer bongs every weekend," Noodles says. "And play drinking games: 'Up the river, down the river.' 'The dice game.' I can't remember any more. I guess that tells its own story."

"So, how much of the $848 do we have left?" Holland asks.

Uh, $836.

Thankfully, the guys have a plan.

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THE BAND
The Offspring

THE MISSION
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THE REASON
Blender asked them to!

"We're going to drive into L.A. and see Metal Shop at the Viper Room," Holland says. "They're an '80s-metal cover band. But they take the piss out of it."

"And then we're going to bail someone out of jail," Noodles adds.

Great. Who?

"Whoever they've got!" the guitarist says, laughing.

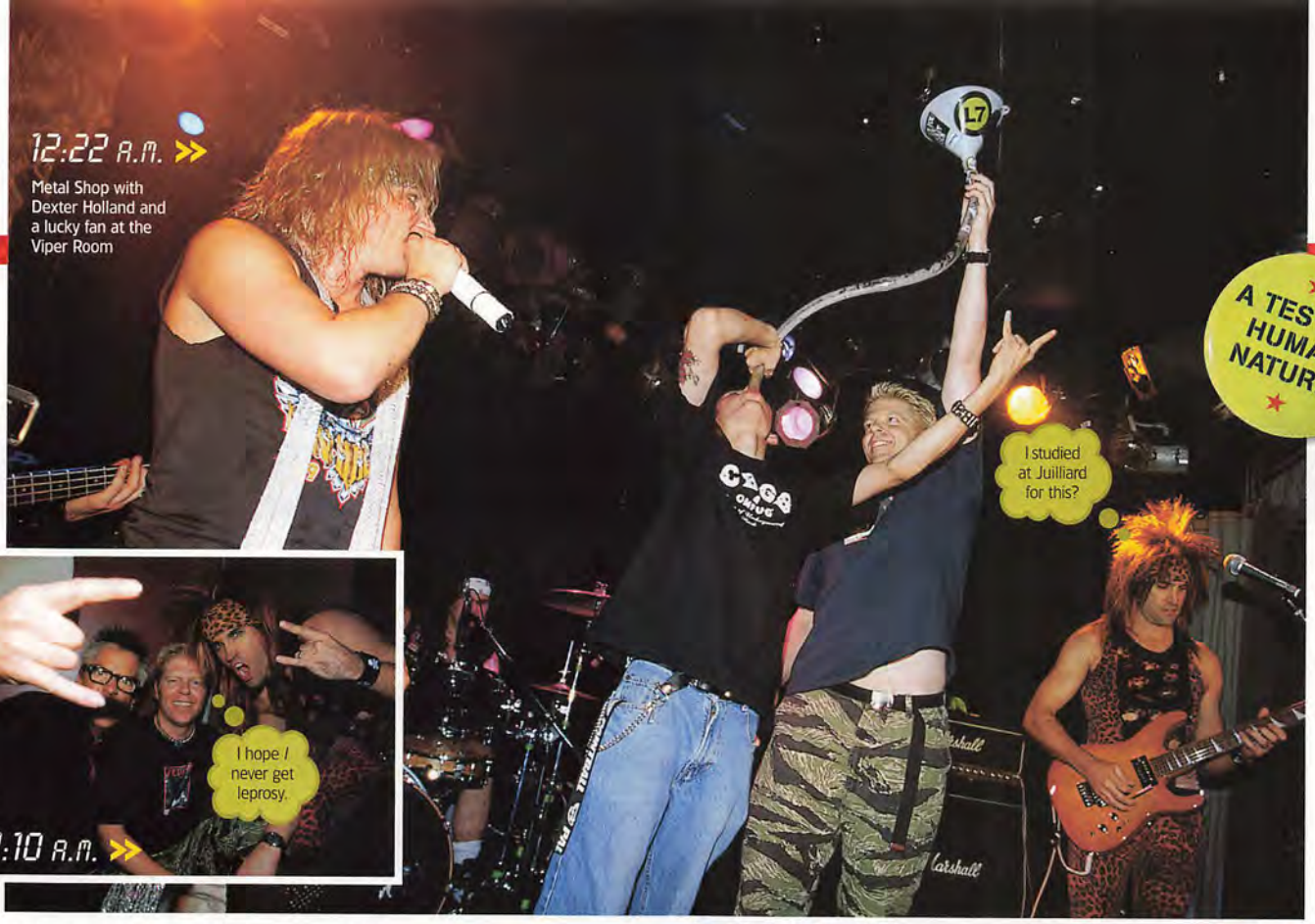
All of which just leaves one question: Are we bringing the beer bong?

"Are we?" gasps an incredulous Noodles. "Fuck, yeah!"

Having secured a designated driver, we jump in the back of Noodles's camper and proceed to Hollywood as the pair enthuse about the Offspring's new album. Their seventh release, *Splinter*, is firmly in the tradition of their previous offerings, mixing up O.C. hardcore with more chart-friendly rockers and, sprinkled throughout, a layer of acerbic humor. The latter is best represented by "Spare Me the Details." A sample lyric: "I'm not the one that acted like a ho/Why must I been the one that has to know?"

"That was inspired by a friend of mine," Holland explains. "It was bad enough that his girlfriend cheated on him. But his friend had to tell him about it. *Really* tell him about it. He said stuff like, 'They had only one rubber, and they used it twice.' The poor guy. I was like, 'There's a song in there somewhere.' "

By midnight, the camper has reached the Viper Room, where, as if in a punk-


12:22 A.M.
Metal Shop with Dexter Holland and a lucky fan at the Viper Room
A TEST OF HUMAN NATURE!
I studied at Juilliard for this?
I hope I never get leprosy.
1:10 A.M.

rock version of *Goodfellas*, we are swiftly ushered to a booth next to the stage. As friends of the band come up to say hello, a round of beer is ordered and swiftly "bonged," followed by a round of Jägermeister shots. Holland and Noodles are assessing the merits of ordering yet more booze when Metal Shop hit the stage in all their big-haired, sparkly-scarved glory.

"I've been here only twice before," Noodles shouts over the capacity crowd's cheers. "And I can't remember one of those times. But the time I can remember, I spent the whole time grinning from ear to ear."

Metal Shop do indeed provide maximum entertainment, mixing up note-perfect renditions of rock perennials ("Rebel Yell," "Cum On Feel the Noize") with arch between-song banter ("You're a fucking gay-basher!" "No way am I a gay-basher — I love Judas Priest!").

It isn't long before they turn their attention to Holland and Noodles.

"Look at that guy from the Offspring doing a beer bong," yells Metal Shop's singer, Ralph Saenz. "Oh, yeah, really cool — rub our noses in the fact that you've got a record deal and we don't!"

Our heroes take their ribbing in good humor, and Holland is even lured onstage to dispense a beer bong to one lucky audience member. "It tastes so good when it hits the lips!" Holland bellows, confirming that this has become the evening's official catchphrase.

"It tastes so good when it hits the lips!"

The show over, we clamber back into Noodles's camper and drive over to the West Hollywood sheriff's station. Despite the pair's advanced state of inebriation ("You might end up bailing *me* out of here," Noodles tells Holland), it's impressive how seriously they take to the task at hand. At the Viper Room, a friend of theirs had informed them that a homeless pal named Dave was behind bars. Holland spends a good five minutes on the phone in the oddly deserted prison talking to the jailer, pleading for Dave's release. It transpires that the prison has no record of a "Dave," prompting Noodles to take over: "How about 'Mark'? What do you have in the way of Marks? Come on, you must have seen *somebody* who doesn't deserve to be here."

Eventually, reluctantly admitting defeat, we return to the camper and set off for parts unknown, with $400 still burning a hole in our pockets. Given that the clock reads 3 A.M., that's where the money seems likely to stay — until we pull into a gas station and are accosted by a very filthy, but very friendly, homeless man. Introducing himself as "Mr. Harold," he offers to show Holland and Noodles a sheaf of what appears to be dog-eared legal papers. The pair decline, instead handing the incredulous Mr. Harold the rest of the cash.

"I hope we've done the right thing," Holland says as we get back into the camper for the final time and head home.

"He's better off than he was before," Noodles argues.

"I think the important thing we've learned," the guitarist continues, "is that you don't need $848 to have a good time. You just need $12 . . . as long as you spend it on a beer bong!" [BLENDER]

Alphonse Teymonde (still-life)

22

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT >>>>>>>

TUPAC SHAKUR

Poverty, rape, drugs, depression and murder: Nothing can stop the legend of Tupac Shakur from growing and growing, as countless posthumous CDs and a new MTV documentary attest. From his first ballet lesson to his beefing with Biggie, *Blender* takes a ride down thug lane . . .

BY JONAH WEINER

1 HE DID JAIL TIME BEFORE HE WAS EVEN BORN.
Tupac's mother, Black Panther Afeni Shakur, was arrested in April 1969 for alleged conspiracy to bomb New York City police stations and landmarks. Temporarily out on bail in 1970, she became pregnant with Tupac but was forced to return to jail when several codefendants skipped town. At trial in May 1971, she successfully defended herself; she then gave birth to Tupac in June. "My embryo was in prison," he later chuckled.

2 HIS FIRST AND MIDDLE NAME MEAN "SHINING SERPENT."
He was named Tupac Amaru, after a freedom-fighting eighteenth-century Incan chief whose body was torn apart by Spanish imperialists. *Shakur* means *thankful to God* in Arabic.

3 HE WAS A PLAYA EARLY ON.
"I was fucking white girls," he recalled years later of his teen years at the Baltimore School for the Arts, a *Fame*-like performing arts high school. Once, he promised sex to a gay male student named Eskiah if he'd help Tupac land a hard-to-get girl named Kelly. Eskiah made it happen, but Tupac reneged: "After I bust my nut, Eskiah was like, 'When's my turn?. . .' I told him, 'You must be out of your fuckin' mind!' "

In the movie *Nothing but Trouble*, 1991

4 HE WAS AN ACTOR AND BALLET DANCER BEFORE HE WAS A RAPPER.
After moving to Maryland with his mother and younger sister in 1984, Tupac was accepted into the Baltimore School for the Arts, where he majored in drama and studied dance. He began battle rhyming on the side, nicknaming himself MC New York.

Afeni Shakur under arrest, April 1969

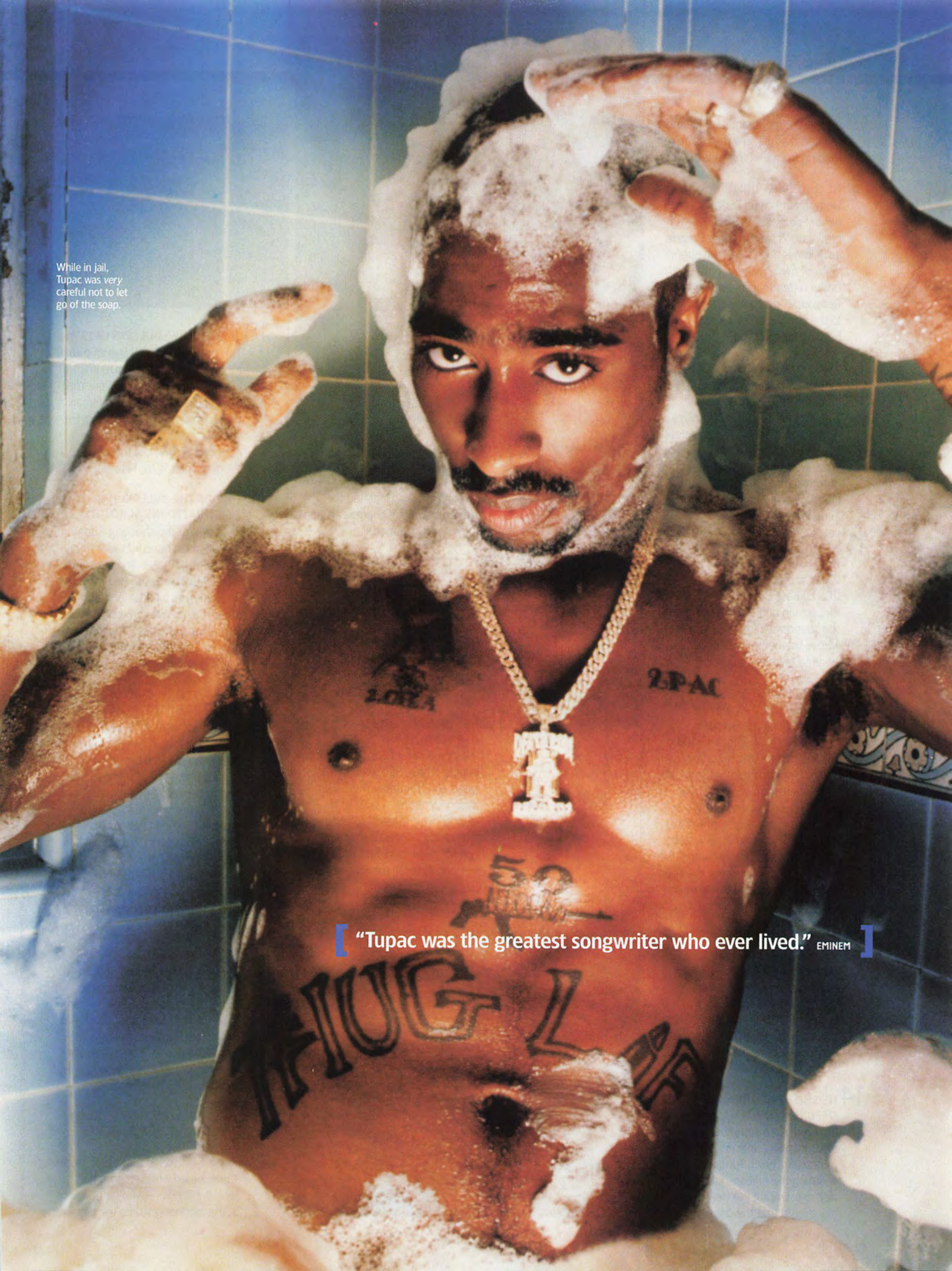
5 HE WAS VERY, VERY POOR . . .
Actress Jada Pinkett Smith, his schoolmate in Baltimore, remembers, "When I met Tupac, he owned two pairs of pants and two sweaters. He slept on a mattress with no sheets."

6 . . . WHICH ADDED TO HIS YOUTHFUL IDEALISM.
Tupac suggested in an early interview that President Reagan could alleviate the nation's homeless problem by opening the doors of the White House to the homeless.

7 HE GOT HIS START AS A BACKUP RAPPER AND DANCER FOR DIGITAL UNDERGROUND.
His friend Leila Steinberg scored him an audience with MC Shock G in 1989. G remembers that Tupac's audition was "street, it was educated, it was articulate. I was like, 'Damn, this cat's intense!' "

8 HE COULDN'T STAND BOOTLEGGERS.
On a trip to New York, he spied a bootlegged copy of Digital Underground's *This Is an E.P. Release* →

This page: AP Wideworld (Afeni Shakur). Opposite page: David LaChapelle/Corbis Outline



While in jail, Tupac was *very* careful not to let go of the soap.

["Tupac was the greatest songwriter who ever lived." EMINEM]

on a street merchant's stand, and toppled the rack in a rage. "You're robbing from me!" he yelled.

9 HE HATED REPUBLICANS.

Democrat Michael Dukakis's presidential defeat in 1988 dismayed him: "I don't want George Bush in government," he said. "I've spent eight of my 17 years on this earth under a Republican, Ronald Reagan, who's an ex-actor who lies to the people, and who has done nothing for me at all."

10 AND DAN QUAYLE HATED HIM.

Extolling his "family values" platform in 1992, Quayle said Tupac's debut album, *2Pacalypse Now*, had "no place in our society." The vice president castigated Time Warner, the parent company of Interscope Records, and the label was soon dropped from the Time Warner fold.

11 HE HAD UNLIKELY TASTE IN MUSIC.

Tupac's record collection included CDs by Kate Bush, Sarah McLachlan and Don McLean, and the soundtrack to *Les Misérables* — whose theme he once called his all-time favorite song.

12 HE ONCE FIRED AN AK-47 INTO HIS SOFA.

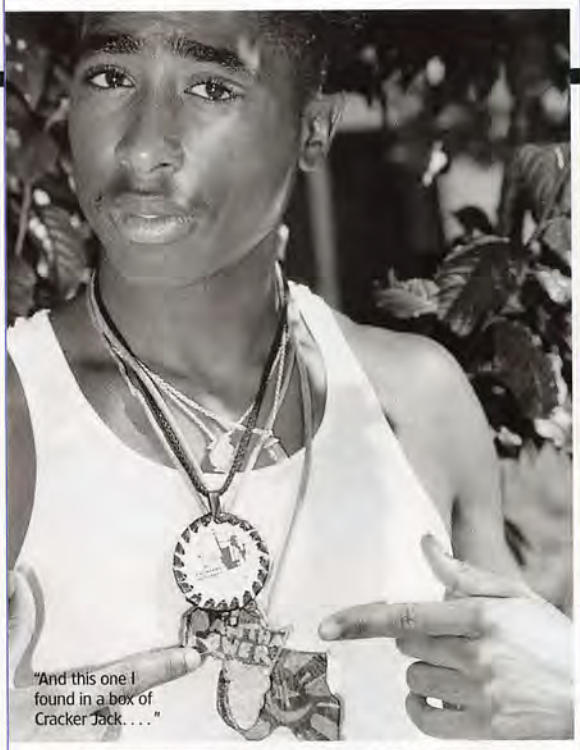
After *2Pacalypse Now* was released in 1991, Shock G visited Tupac at home and was shocked to find his windows open despite the gold records on the wall. Tupac said he wasn't scared of robbers. "He went to his closet," Shock G recalled, "showed me his first AK and said, 'If somebody comes up in here . . . ' *Brrrap!* He shot the floor and the sofa up and damn near killed a couple of kids who were sitting on the couch!"

13 HE WAS A WORKAHOLIC.

He recorded 67 tracks in 11 months during the making of 1995's *All Eyez on Me*; overall, he left some 200 unreleased tracks behind him. "Tupac Shakur was the hardest-working man in hip-hop," Shock G declares.

14 HE SHOT TWO ATLANTA POLICE OFFICERS ONE HALLOWEEN.

Involved in a dispute between two off-duty police officers and a black motorist in 1993, Tupac wound up shooting the officers, claiming self-defense. During the trial, it was discovered that the cops had been drinking and had initiated the incident. Criminal charges against Tupac were dropped.



"And this one I found in a box of Cracker Jack. . . . "

R.I.P.: The *New York Daily News* announces Tupac's death.

15 YOU COULD SAY HE DIDN'T LIKE COPS MUCH.

Once, when asked if he felt remorse for policemen killed in the line of duty, he pretended to sob before barking, "No! They can all motherfuckin' die, until they respect me as a motherfuckin' man, and every black man."

16 HE SUFFERED FROM DEPRESSION.

"He couldn't function sober," Shock G says. "There had to be some weed and Hennessy there. He wasn't so happy — a lot of his laughter was forced." "All around I felt suicidal," Tupac once said. "But I couldn't kill myself. I just wanted somebody to kill me for me."

17 JANET JACKSON WAS AFRAID HE HAD HIV.

Before shooting any kissing scenes for John Singleton's 1993 film *Poetic Justice* — Tupac's second star turn after *Juice* — he said his costar insisted he take an HIV test. He countered that he would take the test only if Jackson would sleep with him.

Tupac's father at a memorial service for his son

18 HE TOOK FIVE BULLETS IN 1994.

Two men armed with 9-mm pistols robbed Tupac of $40,000 in jewelry in the lobby of a New York recording studio, shooting him five times, once through the head. He was rushed to a hospital but checked himself out the next evening, fearing for his safety.

19 ONE OF THE BULLETS HAD PENETRATED HIS SCROTUM.

The night of the shooting, Tupac looked at his boxers, "saw a hole and went, 'Oh, shit. Roll me some weed.' " But he swore he didn't lose a testicle, despite rumors (and jokes that he was now only 1Pac). "My doctors are like, 'You can have babies,' " he said. "It went through the skin and out the skin."

20 HE WAS CONVICTED OF SEXUAL ABUSE THE NEXT DAY.

Ayanna Jackson, a 19-year-old girl Tupac had met in a nightclub, told police that he and two of his friends pinned her to a hotel bed and sodomized and raped her in 1993. Tupac vigorously denied it, claiming he hadn't even been in the room. In court in a wheelchair, he was cleared of sodomy and weapons charges but sentenced to one and a half to four and a half years in prison for sexual abuse.

21 HE HADN'T REALLY MET HIS FATHER UNTIL THE SHOOTING.

Billy Garland, who hadn't seen Tupac since he was 5, came to visit him in the hospital. Tupac considered his stepfather, Mutulu Shakur — a Black Panther serving a 60-year sentence for conspiracy to commit armed robbery and murder — his real father.

22 HE SUSPECTED THAT P. DIDDY AND NOTORIOUS B.I.G. HAD SET HIM UP.

While imprisoned for sexual abuse, Tupac heard whispers that his former friends — who he had seen at the recording studio the night he

Clockwise from top left: Kathy Crawford; Mpozi Tolbert; Howard Jacqueline/Corbis Sygma; Daily News Pix

was shot — had arranged the New York ambush. Biggie denied it and demanded an apology from Tupac, while P. Diddy said, "If I'm-a set a nigga up, which I would never do, I ain't gonna be in the country. I'm-a be in Bolivia somewhere."

23 SUGE KNIGHT GOT HIM OUT OF JAIL. NOT FOR FREE.

The menacing Death Row Records executive posted $1.4 million in bail for Tupac, springing him after 11 months served. In exchange, Tupac signed a handwritten recording contract from his cell, flew to L.A. and started recording *All Eyez on Me*. "A deal with the devil," said Tupac's onetime bodyguard Henry Fayson. *Eyez*, hip-hop's first double CD, would go on to become Tupac's best-selling album.

24 A GLASS OF PISS FUELED THE GROWING DEATH ROW/BAD BOY RIVALRY.

Two months after Tupac joined Death Row, P. Diddy's associate Mark Bell claimed that Tupac and Knight assaulted and beat him. Tupac pressed him for Diddy's home address, Bell maintains, while Knight urinated into a cup and forced him to drink it.

25 TUPAC'S 1996 MURDER IS STILL UNSOLVED.

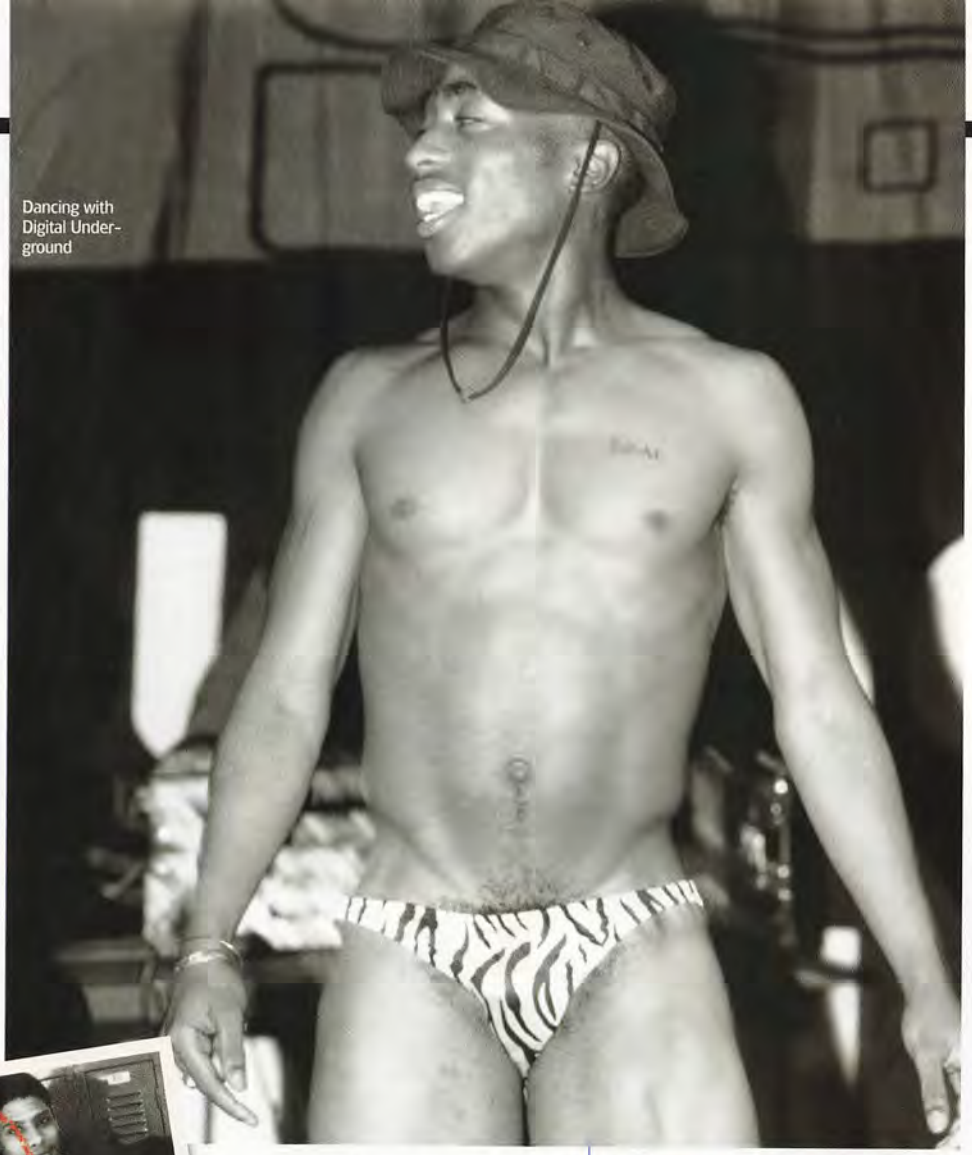
Former L.A. police detective Russell Poole and former officer Kevin Hackie told filmmaker Nick Broomfield that Suge Knight orchestrated the Las Vegas killing. Journalist Chuck Philips maintains that Biggie paid gang member Orlando Anderson to take Tupac out.

26 HE WAS ENGAGED TO QUINCY JONES'S DAUGHTER WHEN HE DIED.

Despite having publicly chastised the legendary producer/arranger for "sticking his dick" in a white woman (Jones's wife, Peggy Lipton), Tupac reconciled with him, started dating his daughter Kidada and soon proposed to her.

27 HE AND MADONNA WERE FRIENDS. AND MAYBE MORE . . .

In his tell-all biography, *Got Your Back*, Tupac's ex-bodyguard Frank Alexander suggests the two slept together: "We were watching a talk show, and they flashed a picture of [Madonna's ex] Carlos Leon and Madonna walking into a New York building on the screen. 'Pac said, 'You know, that used to be me.'"



Dancing with Digital Underground

At the Baltimore School for the Arts, 1988

28 HE IS EMINEM'S IDOL.

"Tupac was the greatest songwriter who ever lived," Marshall Mathers said in 2000.

29 HE SUFFERED FROM PREMATURE BALDNESS.

That's why he shaved his head.

30 HE HAS RELEASED MORE ALBUMS IN DEATH THAN HE DID IN LIFE.

Of the 10 solo CDs he has released, six have come from beyond the grave — and those stand certified 23 times platinum.

31 HE AND BIGGIE RECORDED A SONG TOGETHER.

In August 1994, they teamed up on an Easy Mo Bee–produced song, "Runnin'." An Eminem-produced version of the song appears on the newly released *Tupac: Resurrection* soundtrack.

32 FUNERALGOERS POURED COGNAC INTO THE PACIFIC OCEAN IN HIS MEMORY.

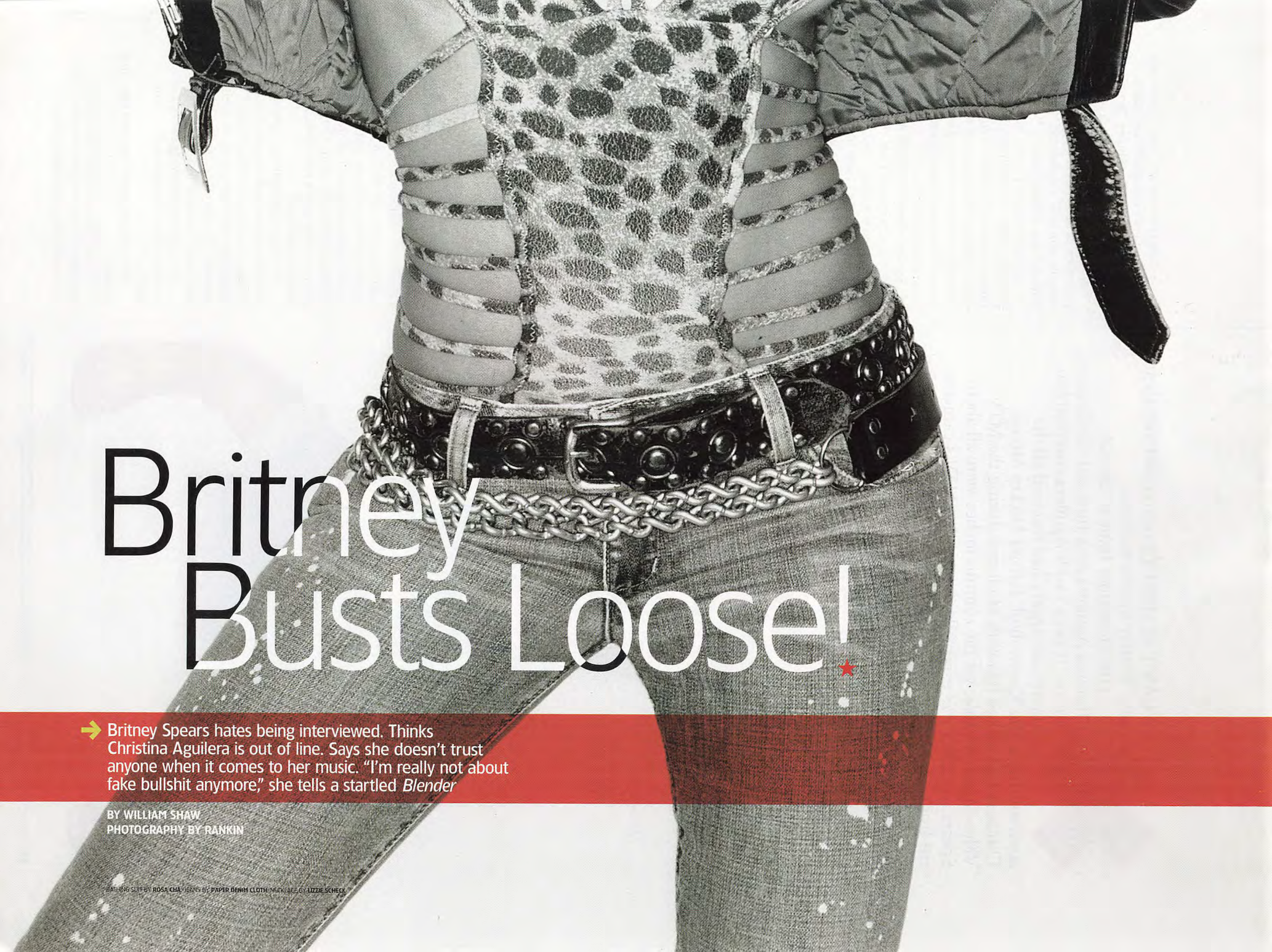
After six days in critical condition, Tupac died on September 13, 1996. At a private funeral ceremony held in Malibu, California, his friends tossed necklaces, packs of his favorite cigarette (Newport) and bottles of Hennessy into the ocean.

33 HE'S REALLY DEAD.

His first posthumous release, in 1996, came under the pseudonym Makaveli, after the famous Italian philosopher who suggested faking one's death to best one's enemies. That plus an Elvis Presley–worthy host of tabloid sightings are all the proof needed for conspiracy theorists that 'Pac never died. His longtime publicist Karen Lee waves off such speculation: "He couldn't have been quiet this long." [BLENDER]

FURTHER READING *Tupac: Resurrection 1971–1996* (Atria Books, 2003); *Tupac Shakur* (Rivers Press, 1998); *Holler if You Hear Me: Searching for Tupac Shakur* (Basic Civitas Books, 2001)
FURTHER VIEWING *Biggie & Tupac* (2002)

From top: Michael Ochs Archives; Yearbook Archives



Britney Busts Loose!

Britney Spears hates being interviewed. Thinks Christina Aguilera is out of line. Says she doesn't trust anyone when it comes to her music. "I'm really not about fake bullshit anymore," she tells a startled *Blender*

BY WILLIAM SHAW
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RANKIN

BATHING SUIT BY ROSA CHA. JEANS BY PAPER DENIM CLOTH. NECKLACE BY LIZZIE SCHECK.

"I CAN'T BELIEVE Christina said that about me," Britney Spears mutters.

In the December issue of *Blender*, Christina Aguilera took time out to talk about Spears. It began with Aguilera complaining about how Spears had received all the attention from The Kiss — both former Mickey Mouse Clubbers had locked lips with Madonna during the MTV Video Music Awards, yet the column inches were all about Spears. Aguilera was especially put out that MTV's cameras cut from her smooch to Justin Timberlake's annoyed reaction.

"You know what, Christina? You're scary."
BRITNEY, ON CHRISTINA AGUILERA

"I didn't even notice that," Spears says when Aguilera's comments are read back to her. She puts on her Shirley Temple face and says coyly, "I'm sorry."

But then *Blender* reads Aguilera's next comment: When she encountered Spears recently, she said, she seemed "like a lost little girl who needs guidance."

Spears is shocked by the quotation; her eyes widen. "That's funny," she fumes, "because I haven't seen her in two years, and then she comes up to me in a club in front of all these people and tries to put her *tongue* down my throat! I'm like, 'How are *you*?' . . . "

Spears, clearly furious at Aguilera's put-down, continues: "I say, 'It's good to see you,' and she goes, 'Well, you're not being real with me.' I was like, 'Well, Christina. What's your definition of being real? Going up to girls and kissing them after you haven't seen them for two years?' A lost girl? I think it's probably the other way around."

You can see that half of Spears knows she shouldn't be saying this, but Aguilera's offhand comments have clearly hurt. She stops and apologizes, then, unable to resist, kicks off one last time: "When somebody's been rude to you so many times, it's like, 'You know what, Christina? I'm really not about the fake bullshit anymore. You're scary and I feel really dark when I get around you, so I need to be over *here* now.' "

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

THE OUTBURST IS, in a way, a relief.

Because Britney Spears has finally said something she really means.

Up to this point in our interview, Spears has maintained an icy self-control. Lipsticked and expressionless, she walked into the room chewing gum, sat down, put her boots up on the table and gazed into the distance. Brusque, you could call it. The sort of entrance that makes you think, This is going to be tough.

So it was. Up until the Christina outburst, Spears had answered questions politely, though sometimes huffily. A few times she didn't even reply, or said, "Your point is?" Or, bluntly, "That's a personal question." Followed by silence.

You ask how many cigarettes she smokes a day. She says curtly, "Nine million."

Nine million, huh? You must have lungs of steel.

"Yep." Then, "I don't fuckin' know. I'm sorry if I seem a little bit bitter," she says in her least apologetic voice, →

VINTAGE T-SHIRT, ROSARY AND SCARF; JEANS BY **PAPER DENIM CLOTH**; GLOVES BY **JUDY ROSEN FOR THE GOOD THE BAD AND THE UGLY**; BOOTS FROM **ATOMIC PASSION**; PEARL EARRINGS AND BRACELET BY **EXHIBITIONIST**

Styling: Kurt & Bart for Beauty & Photo, makeup: Fran Cooper for the Stephen Knoll Salon/Stephanie Louise Inc., hair: Laurentius Puranta for Stephanie Louise Inc., props: Linda Kiel

"Oops . . . I did it again — forgot my shirt!"

VINTAGE LEATHER JACKET AND ROSARY; BRA AND PANTIES BY **DEBORAH MARQUIT**; GLOVES BY **JUDY ROSEN FOR THE GOOD THE BAD AND THE UGLY**; PEARL EARRINGS AND BRACELET AND CROSS NECKLACE BY **EXHIBITIONIST**; JEANS BY **PAPER DENIM CLOTH**

"but I've done a million interviews, and it's the exact same question every time." She draws a breath. "Are we done yet?"

We've barely been with her 20 minutes at this point.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BUT THEN, YOU can understand the pressure Spears feels.

She has been a professional entertainer for exactly half her life. In four years, she has sold more than 50 million records worldwide. She is the first solo female singer to have her first three albums debut at number 1. More importantly, she has been simultaneously idolized and vilified for the extraordinary sexual power she possesses over both kids and grownups. Not since Elvis Presley has one performer, using not much more than hips, beats and a crafty wardrobe, made so many Americans so uncomfortable. Everything from her breasts to her virginity has been subjected to the minutest scrutiny. And she's still only 21.

↑ Spears (right) and Aguilera as kids: "Christina, do you think we'll always be best friends?" "No."

Her survival mechanism has been to build a hard exoskeleton. She admits she has a trick of retreating into herself. She has, she says, "a really good way of escaping in my head. I've always done that. Otherwise I'd go freakin' crazy."

Is there nothing Britney won't kiss?

But we're also now in the era when the million-selling teens of the 1990s are coming of age. They've grown up, and they're anxious to let us know how they've changed. Spears's old beau Justin Timberlake did it spectacularly with his widely praised album *Justified*. And nobody has done away with her lost-little-girl image more deliberately — or successfully — than her old nemesis Christina Aguilera.

Spears started her own process of growing up in public with her third album, 2001's *Britney*, which promised a raunchier, more adult Britney with tracks like "I'm a Slave 4 U." It went straight to number 1, but it was her poorest-selling CD. As a post–teen popper, she still has a lot to prove.

Her new album, *In the Zone*, comes at a critical point in her career. She worked on it longer than any of her previous records. After she completed touring for *Britney*, she was pooped. Her long-term relationship with Timberlake was over. She announced she was taking a "hiatus."

"Well, actually, I just said that I wanted two or three weeks off," she points out. "And the whole world was like, 'Ohmigod, she's gone. . . .' "

For just two or three weeks, she indulged herself: massages, eating strawberries and chocolate and watching *Steel Magnolias* and *America's Sweethearts* with her girlfriends. Then she set about creating *In the Zone*.

By early 2003, Spears was testing out new songs by taking them to clubs such as Show, in New York — the venue name-checked on her new Moby-produced track "Early Mornin'." She became a nightclub regular last year. Though tabloids ran tales of her drunken exploits, she insists these were exaggerated. "I'll just have two or three drinks now and then. I'm not really too much of a drinker," she says cautiously. "Usually when I'm in a club, I'm kind of working, believe it or not. I usually write a song, go there and play it over the loudspeakers."

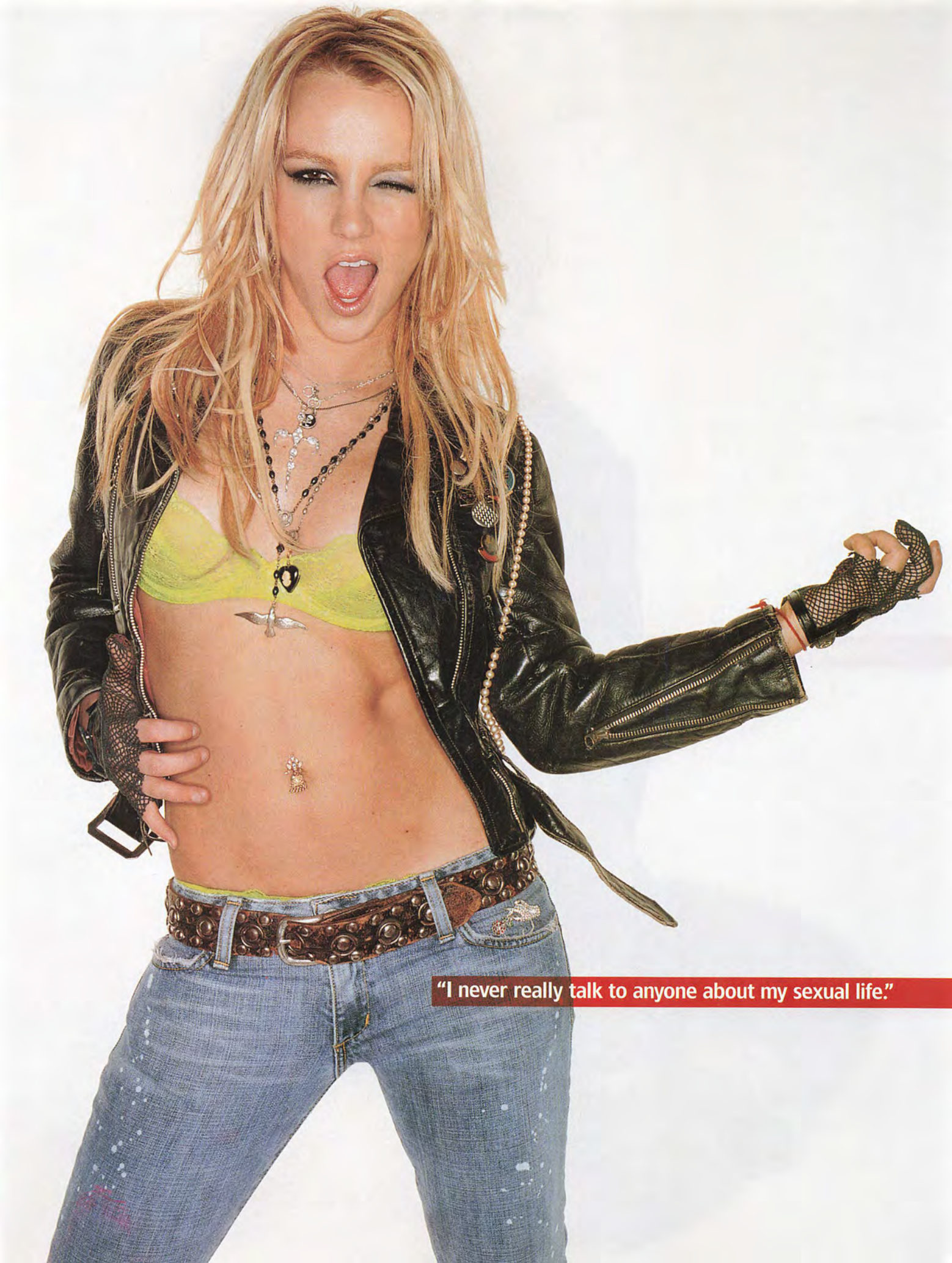
But *In the Zone* is different from what came before — for the first time, she cowrote most of the tracks: eight of 13. "I was already writing songs when I was overseas touring," she says. "The only thing that was scary to me is that I didn't know if they were good."

Do you trust people who tell you they're good?

"No. You can't trust anybody," she says. "You have to go with your feelings."

The songs on *In the Zone* are sexy, occasionally downright lascivious. On "Showdown," she whispers, "I don't really want to be a tease/But would you undo my zipper, please?" Such tracks as "Early Mornin' " depict her trawling the →

From top: WENN; Rankin


"I never really talk to anyone about my sexual life."

"So many girls kiss each other. What's the big deal?"

dance floor to pick up men (a scenario that she insists is purely imaginary).

Despite the raunchiness, she's clearly more comfortable singing about sex than talking about it.

"I never really talk to anyone about my sexual life," she says flatly.

If *In the Zone* has a theme, it's Spears's awakening to her sexuality as a single woman.

"Yeah," she agrees, "but I think it's tastefully done. I don't believe in projecting yourself in a dirty way. But I like doing it because I haven't had that for a while. I was kind of obsessed for a while. People who talk about it all the time, when they don't have it. . . ."

Don't have what?

"Sexuality in their lives."

In other words, the picture she keeps by her bedside is not of some hunk, but of Mikey, her dog. "Ohmigod! Mikey. He's so cute!" she trills.

Single-womanhood has never been as graphically explored as it is on "Touch of My Hand." "Another day without a lover," she purrs, "the more I come to understand the touch of my hand." It's about Britney being on her own and, uh, touching herself.

Where did that come from?

"Mmm. Well, I don't know. It's a clever idea, because there hasn't been a song about masturbation." (*Editor's note: Technically speaking, there have been lots — see the last page of this feature.*)

And masturbation is something everybody does?

"Yes," she says, yawning as if suddenly bored of the topic.

Do you get worried about the reaction a song like that will receive?

"Like what?" she snaps. "Bringing people together to talk about masturbation? That's why I did it."

It is?

"Well if they don't like it, don't listen to it." She erupts in a burst of edgy laughter.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ON SATURDAY, SPEARS is at NBC studios in New York to appear as the musical guest on *Saturday Night Live*.

Spears gamely goes through a skit based on The Kiss, with *SNL* poobah Lorne Michaels lecherously trying to persuade her and Halle Berry to touch lips.

"I already did that Madonna kiss at the VMAs," Spears's scripted reply goes. "I feel like it's already been done."

Off-air, Spears affects shock at the reaction to The Kiss.

"But can Christina do . . . *this?*"

"It's freakin' huge. Like, shit. So many girls kiss each other. What's the big deal? I don't get it. I'm honestly so busy doing my thing, I don't pay much attention to the magnitude of things until someone says, 'That was a big deal.' "

→ Mad flava: A young Britney shills barbecue sauce (below); the Spears family (right), from left: dad Jamie, grandpa Jamie, brother Bryan, sister Jamie-Lyn, Britney, mom Lynne

Missy Elliott said, "We all knew Madonna would do something like that — but Britney? It was like seeing a nun kissing a rapper."

"She thinks I'm a nun?" Spears giggles. "It's so weird how our universe works. One part of the world thinks that I'm, like, so sweet. And another part of the world thinks I'm this sexy vixen. I don't understand it."

Yet that contrast clearly helps make the Britney Spears brand so powerful. It has been there from the beginning, when she herself chose the schoolgirl outfit for her " . . . Baby One More Time" video. She appears genuinely bewildered when mothers attack her for encouraging their children to look sexy. Recently, at a conference on domestic violence, the first lady of Maryland, Kendel Ehrlich, said, "Really, if I had an opportunity to shoot Britney Spears, I think I would." (She later apologized for the comment.)

What would you say to someone who says something like that? →

From top: Rankin; Kevin Mazur/Wireimage.com; WENN

BURN, BABY, BURN! >>>

All the best Britney tunes, all in one place

1 "EARLY MORNIN' "
IN THE ZONE
JIVE, 2003

Moby produces this sultry groove about all-nighters and sexual abandon in the big city. "Hooked up with a guy named Joe . . . what happened next, guess what, you don't wanna know," Britney purrs with a glazed-over cool.

BEST MOMENT Perhaps the sexiest yawn ever recorded. (1:17)

2 "OOPS! . . . I DID IT AGAIN"
OOPS! . . . I DID IT AGAIN
JIVE, 2000

Britney gleefully leads boys on and tosses them away with a mocking "Oops!", cheekily dissing playas and losers alike.

BEST MOMENT The "I'm not that innocent" money line. (1:07)

3 "BOYS"
BRITNEY
JIVE, 2001

A positively feminist move as far as teen-pop goes: Britney flips the script on ogling dudes and does some ogling herself.

BEST MOMENTS The choppy handclaps that echo every other bar.

4 "(YOU DRIVE ME) CRAZY"
. . . BABY ONE MORE TIME
JIVE, 1999

A testament to a love so hysterically all-consuming it could happen only to a 17-year-old. Musically, it's just as overboard: a hip-hop rock-the-bells backbeat, an AOR guitar solo and a swelling chorus smacked on top.

BEST MOMENT "Tell me you're so into me," she begs. (1:23)

5 "BRAVE NEW GIRL"
IN THE ZONE
JIVE, 2003

Channeling No Doubt on the sunny verses and Mirwais-era Madonna on the hook, she sings about losing inhibitions, hitting the dance floor — and hitting the sheets.

BEST MOMENT Britney sings from a man's perspective, "Let's get a room, girl; come and ride with me." (1:25)

6 "(I GOT THAT) BOOM BOOM" (FEATURING THE YING YANG TWINS)
IN THE ZONE
JIVE, 2003

Britney does hip-hop, celebrating her own ass with the help of the Dirty South's foremost twerknicians.

BEST MOMENT A Panjabi MC–style bhangra lick augments the spare breakbeat. (0:51)

David Blaine, eat your heart out.

7 "I'M A SLAVE 4 U"
BRITNEY
JIVE, 2001

Throughout her third album, Spears says she's growing up, but here she crawls around on all fours. The Neptunes drive home the point with a panting electro grind.

BEST MOMENT On the breakdown, synths coo as Britney whispers, "Like that." (1:36)

8 ". . . BABY ONE MORE TIME"
. . . BABY ONE MORE TIME
JIVE, 1999

A masterpiece of underage doubletalk, where loneliness means horniness and "hit me" is a wish for puppy love and an S&M tease. This sent her debut 13 times platinum.

BEST MOMENT Backing vocals echo Britney's "I still believe!" on the hook. (0:52)

9 "OUTRAGEOUS"
IN THE ZONE
JIVE, 2003

Moaning the praises of both her sex drive and shopping sprees — in that order — Britney and producer R. Kelly bring Middle Eastern funk to the proceedings.

BEST MOMENT The nonsense chants. (1:10)

10 "THE BEAT GOES ON"
. . . BABY ONE MORE TIME
JIVE, 1999

Her covers — "Satisfaction" on her second album, "I Love Rock N Roll" on the next — are usually embarrassing. So is this one, but it rides a great bass groove, while future sounds AWOL from a Beck album barge in unexpectedly.

BEST MOMENT When Britney sings, "We still dream of sharing our last" — *smooch* — "kiss." (2:41) *JONAH WEINER*

At the 2001 Video Music Awards: "Hey, has anybody seen my snake?"

"I would say to chill out. I'm not responsible for their kids. The only person I worry about is my little sister, and that's it. I'm not here to please another family, just mine." She pauses. "I don't know. I think it's a good thing for kids to be able to express themselves."

Did you find it odd when you were interviewed about The Kiss on CNN by a bow-tied Tucker Carlson?

Spears looks completely blank. She does this a lot. "Oh," she suddenly remembers. "The fuddy-duddy guy? He was so sophisticated. It was like, 'Go take a Valium.' Bless his heart. He was really into the interview a bit too much."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

ON THE SMALL *SNL* stage, Spears and her dancers rip through *In the Zone*'s first single, the Madonna collaboration "Me Against the Music."

Dancing and singing, Spears is in her element. She drips song-and-dance confidence. Within a few seconds, her shiny hat falls off, sending her blond hair everywhere, but Spears doesn't miss a step. When it comes to Madonna's verse, she can't help mouthing along to the words. She's clearly elated to have had Madonna guest on her new album.

Spears has been a Madonna fan for years. The first time they met, Spears said awkwardly, "I think I should hug you." "I was kind of pitiful," she says, smiling at the memory. "I didn't know what to say. I can't believe she's on the record."

It's not just that she's on the record; Madonna wrote the verse unbidden. "I just asked her to do a little thing," Spears says, "but she really went there. She did a lot of stuff to it."

Spears was in a hotel room in Boston when the tape arrived. When she heard the verse Madonna had added to the song, she was, she says, "beyond surprised." She cried.

"Hey Britney/You say you wanna lose control/Come over here; I got something to show ya. . . . "

The lyrics could be Madonna generously passing the baton to the new talent. But they also sound like a taunt from the old guard to the uptight youngster. It's time to lose control.

"If you think you're so hot/Better show me what you got. . . . "

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BACKSTAGE, SPEARS doesn't hang out with the stars. She stays within her own comfort zone. She prefers to hang out with her girlfriends. They have, she says, recently discovered hookahs. Spears's favorite smoke is strawberry-flavored tobacco. "I didn't even know there was

From top: Marc Baptiste/Corbis Outline; Kevin Mazur/Wireimage.com

such a thing as hookah until two weeks ago," she says.

She stops abruptly and asks, "Hookah's not like weed, is it?"

No.

She looks relieved.

Spears has drifted from her Baptist upbringing toward New Agey, self-help therapeutics. She reads books like Peter Maurer's *My Way: A Layman's Guide to Atoms, Physics, and the Human Experience* (not much physics, but a lot of Buddhism) and books on relaxation and self-realization like Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now*. On her wrist she wears the same Kabbalah-inspired red thread that Madonna wears. "It's supposed to ward off evil and people judging you and constantly giving you the evil eye," Spears says. "Once it's had as much as it can take, it falls off."

She fingers it. "It's supposed to fall off every six months. Mine falls off every other day," she deadpans.

The second song Spears performs on *SNL* is "Everytime."

It's not her greatest ballad, but the lyrics, about a breakup, are certainly heartfelt. She sings, "I make believe that you are here/It's the only way I see clear/What have I done? You seem to move on easy." It's a song to a lost lover she wants back. "I have made it rain/Please forgive me/My weakness caused you pain/And this song is my sorry. . . ."

Spears and Justin Timberlake were rumored to have split because she allegedly cheated on him with choreographer Wade Robson. Timberlake sang about the breakup on "Never Again" and "Cry Me a River," which blamed Spears for what happened. "You don't have to say what you did," he sang. "I already know — I found out from him."

Are you an autobiographical songwriter?

"I write about myself and my experiences, but not to the point where it's so personal I feel self-exploited."

But "Everytime" appears to be about your ex.

"Umm," she says, then pauses.

Is it?

She answers flatly: "That's a personal question."

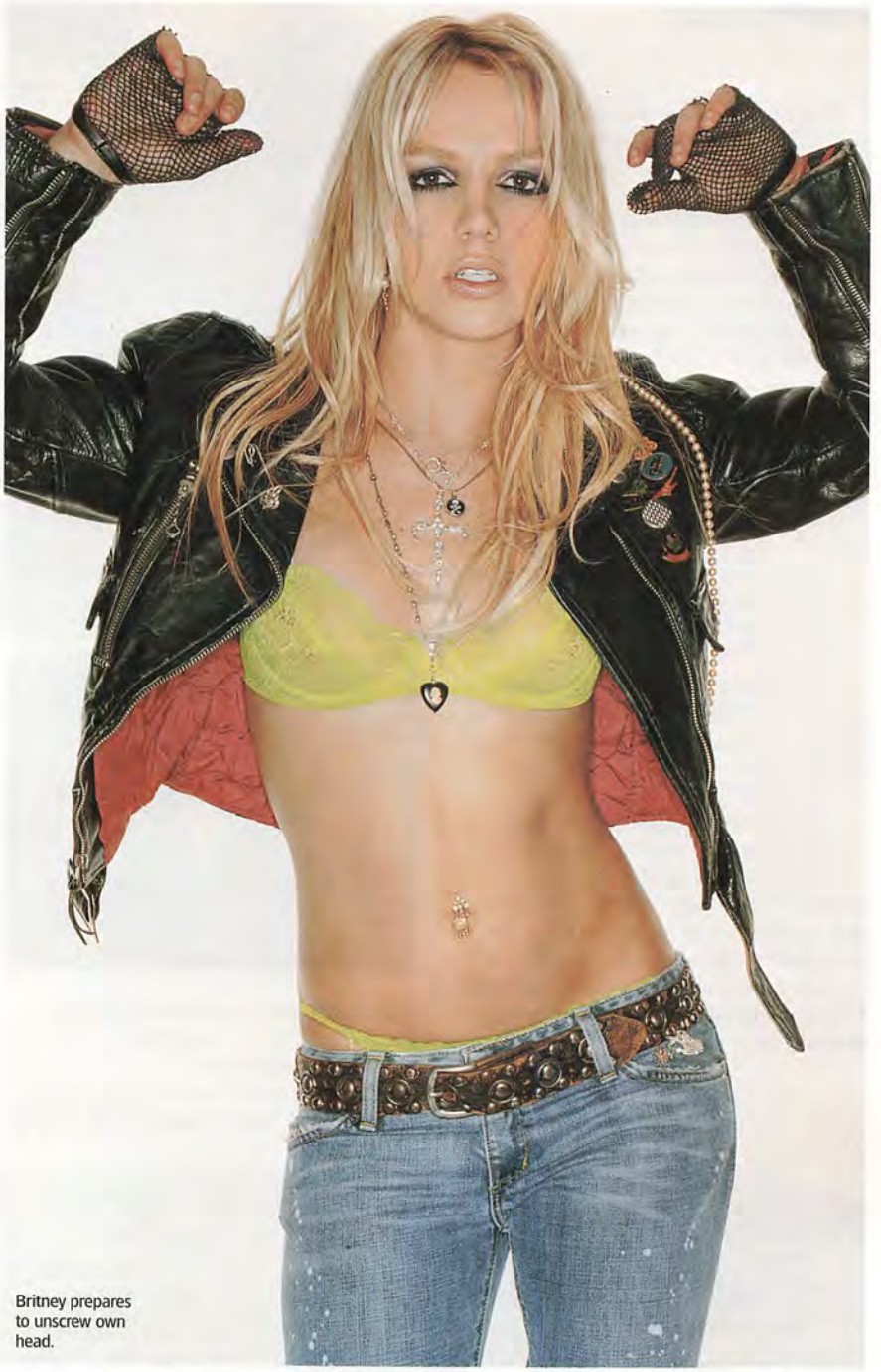
So you're not saying that it's not about Justin — you just don't want to answer because it's personal?

Tight-lipped agreement: "Mmm."

There follows the sort of uncomfortable pause you hope Spears will fill. But of course she doesn't.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FOUR DAYS AFTER *SNL*, we're cloistered in a small conference room in Trump Towers in Manhattan. Our interview is not going especially well.



Britney prepares to unscrew own head.

Do you know how much money you have?

"I don't know," she says, exasperated. "I know how much money I have in my trust fund, but that's a personal question."

We're not asking you for figures. Just, are you the sort of person who keeps an eye on her money? Do you know how much a quart of milk is?

"I don't know — $4.50?"

During your so-called hiatus, when Christina and Justin released their albums and both of them did well, didn't a part of you sit there and think, "Damn, I've got nothing out"?

"I had my moment. I had my time. I think it's inspiring when Shakira or Avril Lavigne does something. Gwen Stefani. Madonna. We're all true artists. We're just here as vessels trying to bring some light to the world. That's all it boils down to."

"Shakira, Gwen Stefani, Avril Lavigne, Madonna: We're all true artists."

★

So you never suffer from bouts of paranoia?

"What are you talking about?" she says, suddenly testy. "I just don't understand where you're coming from." ➔

Spears with Justin Timberlake at the *Crossroads* premiere, 2002

Did you hear about how U.S. soldiers found a picture of you on the wall inside one of Saddam Hussein's palaces in Iraq?

"They did? That's scary." She picks up a bottle of water. "So what?" she suddenly asks, suspicious that *Blender* is trying to pin something bad on her.

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, you were mentioned as one of the reasons people were hostile to America. You were alleged to represent the immorality and hegemony of American culture.

"What the hell are you talking about?"

Did you ever hear that?

"This interview," she says, "is *way* too deep."

Pause.

Given that you're just beginning to promote your new CD, you've got months of interviews ahead of you. It's going to be trying, isn't it?

"Yes, it is."

How on earth are you going to cope?

Suddenly for a second, the ice melts. She relaxes with a sudden burst of laughter. "Oh, I don't know. Gosh," she says. "I work out at night and I box, and that relieves a lot of stress. I love to box."

And presumably you imagine that you're striking a journalist every time you hit a punching bag?

"No!" She laughs again. "I'm sorry. I'm being kind of rude right now," she says.

Britney enjoys smoking, swallowing flies.

"And I feel bad about saying the stuff about Christina. . . . But there's been some shady stuff there."

Later, we travel down to New York's Gotham Hall, where Spears is rehearsing for a prime-time concert special for ABC. When she arrives, she's herded straight in front of the cameras for an E! interview that has been shoehorned into her airless promotion schedule.

Earlier, Spears had insisted that this time around, she doesn't really want or expect the sort of megastardom that she once enjoyed. Does anyone believe a pop star when she says that? Maybe Spears really means it, though.

"You know," she says, "I'm not at the point now where I want to sell 50 million records. I've been there. Done that. I just want people to enjoy the music." She pauses for a beat. "Although it would be nice to go to number 1." [BLENDER]

SONGS ABOUT DIDDLING!

DO THE JERK!

Britney's masturbation ode "Touch of My Hand" ("I love myself/It's not a sin") is but the latest pop song to celebrate the joys of self-love . . .

THE WHO
"PICTURES OF LILY"
MAGIC BUS *MCA, 1968*
In which Pete Townshend recalls being introduced to nature's sleeping pill when his father gives him some lewd photographs.
WANKIEST LYRIC "I got so sick of having sleepless nights, I went and told my dad/He said, 'Son, now here's some little something' and stuck them on my wall."
KLEENEX FACTOR 2 (OUT OF 5)

OZZY OSBOURNE
"NO BONE MOVIES"
BLIZZARD OF OZZ *JET, 1980*
This guilty pledge to lay off the Spectravision flicks climaxes with the Double O admitting that, alas, this is yet another habit he just can't beat.
WANKIEST LYRIC "Voyeur straining in love with his hand/A poison passion, a pulsating gland."
KLEENEX FACTOR 3

ELVIS COSTELLO
"PUMP IT UP"
THIS YEAR'S MODEL *COLUMBIA, 1978*
With the physique, eyesight and complexion of a member of the school chess club, it's little wonder that Costello was often left practicing the safest sex of all.
WANKIEST LYRIC "Under the pressure pin/Fall into submission/Hit-and-run transmission/No use wishing now for any other sin."
KLEENEX FACTOR 2

BILLY IDOL
"DANCING WITH MYSELF"
BILLY IDOL *CAPITOL, 1982*
This sneering, bleached poseur prodding at his privates goes down as one of the most unpleasant images in rock history.
WANKIEST LYRIC "When there's no one else in sight/In the crowded, lonely night/Well, I wait so long for my love vibration/And I'm dancing with myself."
KLEENEX FACTOR 2

CYNDI LAUPER
"SHE BOP"
SHE'S SO UNUSUAL *COLUMBIA, 1984*
She insisted that girls just want to have fun, and she wasn't kidding. Often overlooked as an anthem of sexual empowerment, largely because of the giggly pop beat.
WANKIEST LYRIC "They say I better get a chaperone/Because I can't stop messin' with the danger zone."
KLEENEX FACTOR 5

RADIOHEAD
"THINKING ABOUT YOU"
PABLO HONEY *CAPITOL, 1993*
Yes, Radiohead! Enervating. Depressing. Lonely. What were you expecting? The *Hustler* magazine letters page, maybe?
WANKIEST LYRIC "Been thinking about you, and there's no rest/Shit, I still love you, still see you in bed/But I'm playing with myself, what do you care/When I'm not there."
KLEENEX FACTOR 1

BUZZCOCKS
"ORGASM ADDICT"
TIME'S UP *MUTE, 1977*
This punk standard is only half about monkey-spanking. The addict moves on to twosomes with butcher's assistants.
WANKIEST LYRIC "You get in a heat, you get in a sulk/But you still keep beating your meat to a pulp."
KLEENEX FACTOR 4

WANKIEST SONG EVER!

THE DIVINYLS
"I TOUCH MYSELF"
DIVINYLS *VIRGIN, 1991*
An unambiguous admission of self-discovery from statuesque Australian singer Christina Amphlett gave the DiVinyls the only hit of their 15-year career.
WANKIEST LYRIC "I don't want anybody else/When I think about you, I touch myself!"
KLEENEX FACTOR 5

Fred Prouser/Reuters (Spears and Timberlake); Rick Mackler/Globe Photos (in car); Gary Han (illustrations, 3)

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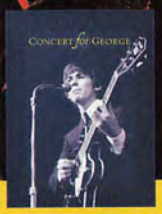

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✪✪✪

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KID ROCK
Detroit badass mixes the hip-hop with the Southern rock — again!
✪✪

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CHER
"Hello, my pretties!": The queen of camp works a live Halloween witches' brew
✪✪✪

The Guide

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G-UNIT

Rap's biggest star and his bullet-riddled homies toast the street life — and the sweet life — on their debut, p104

Clockwise from top left: Warwick Saint; Sian Kennedy/Retna Ltd.; Neal Preston; Nela Koenig

In the Keys of Life

New York songwriter follows boring blockbuster with soul-dipped thriller

ALICIA KEYS
THE DIARY OF ALICIA KEYS

★★★★

J RECORDS

BY EVEN THE most rigid standards, Alicia Keys's 2001 debut, *Songs in A Minor*, was a smash. It sold more than 5 million copies, dropped two Top 10 singles ("Fallin' " and "A Woman's Worth") and earned five Grammy Awards. Keys, who wears gangsta cornrows and grew up immersed in hip-hop in uptown New York but also studied classical composition and sometimes plays a bit of Beethoven in concert, emerged as a singer-songwriter-instrumentalist-producer with genuine urban swagger: the first new pop artist of the millennium who was capable of changing music.

Only two female soloists in recent memory have so completely wooed the music industry and the public: Lauryn Hill, who followed 1998's *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* with a puzzling live set, and Norah Jones, who has yet to come behind 2002's *Come Away With Me* with a second long-player. So *The Diary of Alicia Keys* makes Keys the first of these exalted chanteuses to see if she can live up to her own hype and sales.

Still a fresh face at 22, Keys has created an enthusiastic album full of masterful strokes and electrifying intensity. *Songs in A Minor* was accessible and familiar out of the gate — "Fallin' " regurgitated time-honored R&B sentiment without any new depth or insight, save for a James Brown–influenced piano riff, and the album seemed to garner praise for being precocious, sophisticated and boring. A Sting duet seemed moments away. But the follow-up is daring at nearly every turn. Largely self-produced, it encompasses the subtleties of hip-hop and '70s soul along with nuances of Keys's classical training, much as her debut did, but with a deftness and explorative verve that were previously absent.

Her album flaunts masterful strokes and electrifying intensity. ★

On the first single, "You Don't Know My Name," acclaimed hip-hop maestro Kanye West takes a sample from an obscure number by '70s R&B trio Main Ingredient to create a track as current as it is classic. It's full of the sweet stuff of a secret crush, and Keys takes the concept further by reintroducing the spoken interlude, a '70s staple, in the character of a waitress phoning a handsome customer she has admired in the restaurant. Her voice, full of insecurity mixed with determination, exemplifies the refinement on this record. Keys has gotten better at conveying the sensation behind her words, delivering her lines with a shaded, complex emotionalism that sounds as though she's working through every romantic hurdle a woman her age can face.

On "If I Was Your Woman/Walk on By," veteran beatmaker Easy Mo Bee tweaks the spinal column of Isaac Hayes's "Walk on By," leaving exposed nerve endings of tingling sound, as Keys interpolates the piano and words of Gladys Knight's 1971 soul smash "If I Were Your Woman." On *A Minor*'s "Girlfriend," she expressed similar sentiments, but in a playground way: "I think I'm jealous of your girlfriend." Here, she's all pent-up passion, turning a number about dignified, unrequited love into a coquettish advance gilded with attitude.

When Timbaland shows up for "Heartburn," he seems to cram most of a high-school marching band into a basement party for a finger-snapping, toe-tapping, waist-shuffling jam. But Keys doesn't need to rely on the day's hottest rap producers. "Karma" uses flittering strings, low-end keys, splices of a breakbeat and pure street sass to claim retribution on a past lover.

"If I Ain't Got You" is the type of torch song Whitney Houston would turn into a blazing inferno and Mariah Carey would fashion into a searchlight, but Keys treats it like a candlelight vigil. For "Diary," she teams up with the two-thirds of Tony! Toni! Toné! who aren't Raphael Saadiq for acoustic intimacy, cooing, "I will keep your secrets/Just think of me as the pages in your diary."

When she reaches for depth, Keys sometimes clutches clichés of an almost Bon Jovi–like overfamiliarity. But her grasp of songwriting and arrangement has grown along with her vocal prowess, which lets her bring boilerplate lyrics to life, most notably on "Slow Down" and "When You Really Love Someone." She's also capable of strong poetics: "Samsonite Man" is a metaphor for an itinerant lover, and on "Dragon Days," she equates her longing for a distant beau with a heat that makes "the days drag on."

No mimicking traditionalist, Keys adores '70s soul for its generosity, dignity and — this is key — respect for women, qualities she increasingly emphasizes in her own songs. After a vague, overpraised debut, she now sounds like one of the musical masters she reveres. *kris ex*

ALICIA KEYS HER FAVORITE CDs

PRINCE
SIGN "O" THE TIMES
WARNER BROS., 1987

"The first time I heard this, I was *stunned*. 'Adore' makes me melt. I've played that song a hundred million times. Prince sends you into a world you never thought could be talked about. He puts me in a very anything-can-happen mood."

STEVIE WONDER
FULFILLINGNESS' FIRST FINALE
MOTOWN, 1974

"He's limitless. There's this somber song here, 'They Won't Go When I Go.' It's so melancholy. It's about loneliness, isolation. Every time I listen to Stevie, I close my eyes, because that's how you *really* see what's going on."

MILES DAVIS
SKETCHES OF SPAIN
COLUMBIA/LEGACY, 1960

"The perfect bath record. You run the bubble bath, put this on, light some candles and just listen. It's quiet and beautiful, and there are no words, so you can draw your own pictures. He communicates rebellion, and I love that about him."

DONNY HATHAWAY
EVERYTHING IS EVERYTHING
RHINO, 1970

"He sang the way he lived: socially conscious, connected to the world. On 'A Dream,' he tells a story about a woman, and it's enrapturing. At the end, he says it was all a dream. It's sad, but it's also imaginative, idealistic."

This page: Mr. Snuggles (still-lifes, 4), opposite page: courtesy of J Records

Dear Santa: Why didn't you bring me a freakin' chair like I asked?

RYAN ADAMS

LOVE IS HELL PT. 1 ✪✪✪

LOST HIGHWAY

An EP of brooding waltzes from alt-country whiz kid

The title's not quite right. Hell hurts, hell's scary, but it's also hot and fiery — here, love is a cold, morose affair. Throughout this EP, Ryan Adams drags himself through quiet nightmares populated by forlorn he's and she's, his voice a gravelly croak; meanwhile, pianos and acoustic guitars trace meandering paths, insolent and inconsolable. "It's painful for me to hear myself that way," Adams told *Blender*, describing this music, which was shelved when he started recording the exuberant *Rock N Roll*, and which will now be released as two EPs. The bleakness is stirring as often as it is enervating: From his despairing Thom Yorke–ish refrain ("There's no guarantees") on "Political Scientist" to his sketch of domestic unrest and denial on "This House Is Not for Sale," Adams bares a trembling, defeated core. It's not pretty, but it can be beautiful.

JONAH WEINER

THE SCORE »

✪✪✪✪✪ EXCELLENT. A MUST-HAVE

✪✪✪✪ GREAT. CHECK IT OUT

✪✪✪ GOOD IN ITS GENRE

✪✪ JUST OK

✪ WEAK

AIR

TALKIE WALKIE ✪✪✪

VIRGIN

Influential Parisian ambient duo make beautiful instrumentals and sing like little girls

Air's debut album, 1998's *Moon Safari*, and 2000 soundtrack to Sofia Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides* offered an enigmatic mix of gentle ambience, easy-listening orchestration, pattering beats and luscious melodies — Dido was clearly taking notes. They came unstuck with 2001's overcooked *1000Hz Legend*, which thought it was spoofing prog-rock excesses but was merely repeating them. *Talkie Walkie* returns to basics, but Air's JB Dunckel takes over for the guest vocalists they usually import: Cue a heavily accented voice so twee, even Belle and Sebastian fans will balk. The lyrics are odd, too: "Stay like ziss, on ze 'airs of my chest," Dunckel suggests on "Run." But if the vocal tracks sound irredeemably icky as a result, the instrumentals, including "Alone in Kyoto" (from Coppola's latest movie, *Lost in Translation*), are as dreamily engaging as ever.

JAMES SLAUGHTER

Avant sure hopes he remembered to put bullets in his "finger gun" this morning.

AVANT

PRIVATE ROOM ✪

GEFFEN

Young "ghetto soul" star from Chicago cherishes the '80s more than he should

Just like many of his songs, Avant's name sounds like DeVante, of R&B passion players Jodeci, but with a few sounds missing. Meanwhile, in French his name means *before*, as in "before you buy this, surely there's some European remix of R. Kelly coughing in rhythm that's more worth your *crème de cashish*." The artist's third offering, *Private Room*, is an old-age home for New Jack Swing, where such jump tracks as "Hooked on You" and "You" dream of vigor and Viagra, and love ballads like "Don't Take Your Love Away" dodder around reminiscing over Anita Baker, gumming their Marvin Gaye quotations and pretending that if a groove is flat, it must be smooth. File under: Heard It All *Avant*.

RENE VIENET

ROAD WARRIORS

All the hits and none of the politics — live! — from Nashville upstarts

THE DIXIE CHICKS

TOP OF THE WORLD ✪✪✪

OPEN WIDE/MONUMENT/COLUMBIA

FIRST, THE Dixie Chicks got famous for being a whip-smart against-the-country-grain trio, championing bluegrass banjo and fiddle before *O Brother* made it cool, and championing girl power in a genre that hasn't always treated women equally. Then they got *way* famous when singer Natalie Maines said she was ashamed President Bush comes from Texas, the group's home state.

The double live CD *Top of the World* arrives just in time for a brand-new dust-up, after violinist Martie McGuire told a reporter that the group wasn't a country act anymore after Toby Keith beat up on them and country radio abandoned them in the name of patriotism.

Here, rocking out means doing the unexpected thing: With right-wing talk-show hosts and corporate radio moguls telling the Chicks to "shut up and sing," that's exactly what they do. It's surprising, and a little unexpected, too. *Top of the World* replicates their 2003 tour, but there's almost none of the between-song banter. It's as if the Chicks are trying to bring us back to the music and remind us why they got famous in first place.

What you do hear between songs is a huge amount of crowd noise — the tour had to be the longest continual girls' night out in history. *Top of the World* features songs from the Chicks' last three albums, rousing versions of "Goodbye Earl," "Truth No. 2," "Travelin' Soldier" and others. It's greatest-hits time, though there's nothing like playing your hits while the president is talking about you at press conferences to make you wake up and play for keeps.

Left-wing politics made the Chicks the most scurrilous band since the Sex Pistols came to Texas. Which is a white-trash hoot, because the music is acoustic, red-white-and-blues rootsy. It's modest — decent in both senses of the word — and this record documents a good time erupting during a major media bummer. *RJ SMITH*

BANJOIST EMILY ROBISON'S CURRENT LISTENING

» STEVE EARLE *JERUSALEM ARTEMIS*

» COLDPLAY *A RUSH OF BLOOD TO THE HEAD CAPITOL*

» The Chicks remind us why they got famous in the first place.

BIG TYMERS

BIG MONEY HEAVYWEIGHT ✪✪

CASH MONEY/UNIVERSAL

New Orleans rappers take rhymes straight out of the *Robb Report*. Again.

If keeping it real means rapping about what you know, these materialists are really, *really* real. If, say, they brag about filling a Lear jet with Jacuzzis, dipping it in gold and welding a stretch Hummer on top, these self-made multimillionaires actually can. As MCs, Mannie Fresh and Baby Williams are nonentities — if cleverness, varied subjects and attention to rhythm are important criteria. So their fourth record is slow going, sped along by three great moments: the R. Kelly–produced "Gangsta Girl," opulent with tinkling pianos and flutes (and a millionth *party/Bacardi* rhyme, gleefully beaten to death, then chased into the afterlife); the hard electro and Glocks-cock-bodies-drop threats of "Back Up"; and the kiddie-like luxury checklist "Got Everything." On the first, Fresh shares his bedroom creed: "I nut once, she nut twice." They're rich, not selfish.

JONAH WEINER

CALIFONE

HERON KING BLUES ✪✪✪

THRILL JOCKEY

Limber swamp-rock courtesy of Chicago weirdos

Something's always being overtaken by something else deep in Califone's murk. An oily slide guitar wraps its tendrils around an unsuspecting drum machine; electronic loops lay their eggs inside spare acoustic arrangements; a loose funk riff builds up an encrustation of faint free-jazz horns. Songwriter and guitarist Tim Rutili sings in a dazed mutter, as if he's distracted by memories of last night's creepy dreams: "You're the root, you're the hanging tree, you're Easter in the Philippines," runs one part of "2 Sisters Drunk on Each Other." The densely arranged 15-minute title track spins a cocoon of glutinous, half-atonal noodling around a breathy and curiously fragile voice until it disappears. Fortunately, Califone aren't just playing a brain game: For all their wriggly noise details and fragmented language, their center of gravity is in their hips.

DOUGLAS WOLK

CEX

MARYLAND MANSIONS ✪✪✪✪

JADE TREE

Beyond-the-Beltway bad boy brings the suburbs to neon life

The track listing starts off like an instruction manual for freshmen in the School

Califone: You can open your eyes — it's a good review!

of Being Bad: "Drive Off a Mountain," "Stop Eating," "Take Pills," "Kill Me." But Cex's fifth full-length (at the tender age of 22) is way higher education from the MC with "a doctorate in cold-rockin' it." Deconstructed sonics phase between absent-minded professor and glitch-craft, a stylistic dissertation on the futility of naming genres from this former kolleague of laptop demolition man Kid606. Like any subdivision-dwelling whiz kid, he builds reality in his head, especially in "My Head" — the sound of the suburbs on a human scale. Eminem may have been sent to piss off the world, but the former Rjyan Kidwell just wants to make it strange all over again.

RENE VIENET

CRASH TEST DUMMIES

PUSS 'N' BOOTS ✪✪✪

RYKODISC

Canadian combo mixes barroom tales with froggish croaks on seventh album

When we first heard Brad Roberts's cellar-deep voice, it was cracking wry about odd occurrences on the quirky 1994 hit "Mmm Mmm Mmm Mmm" (the easiest *Wheel of Fortune* answer ever). That was it, as far as the American Top 40 was concerned. Nine years and a near-fatal car wreck later, Roberts has traded bemused observation for an enthusiastic embrace of sex, drugs and aggression, which not only adds resonance to his chesty rumble but also puts a much-needed edge on the Dummies' folk-based sound. With songs ranging from throbbingly insistent ("Triple Master Blaster") to darkly ominous ("Stupid Shame") to outright majestic ("Flying Feeling"), *Puss 'N' Boots* makes men acting badly seem like a very good idea indeed.

J.D. CONSIDINE

CRYSTAL METHOD

LEGION OF BOOM ✪✪

V2

Las Vegas techno duo have nü-metal pals but no nü ideas

In 1997, Crystal Method emerged from the West Coast rave scene and soon became ubiquitous in commercials and video games. It was fashionable to suggest that their combination of techno and rock dynamics represented the future of music. Fashionable but wrong, as *Legion of Boom* demonstrates. Appearances from former limp-bizkiteer Wes Borland and John Garcia, onetime frontman of stoner-rockers Kyuss, can't distract from the album's failings. The problem is not the lumbering, mid-tempo beats or the terrible lyrics ("Synthesizer, crystallizer, realizer"), although neither help. It's the sense that you've heard every synthesized squelch and ambient breakdown before. And you probably have: Frankly, *Legion of Boom* could have been made by any number of DJ-friendly artists at any point in the last 10 years. Dated techno — isn't that missing the point?

JAMES SLAUGHTER

EISLEY

MARVELOUS THINGS ✪✪✪

REPRISE

With a lovely second EP, Coldplay tourmates replace Hanson as Best Family of Towheaded Musical Moppets

Growing up home-schooled and cableless in the East Texas town of Tyler, the DuPree kids had a lot of time to develop

I LOVE THIS CD!

SARAH SILVERMAN
COMEDIAN IN *SCHOOL OF ROCK* AND *HAIR HIGH*

CLEM SNIDE
SOFT SPOT
SPINART

"They're a country-rock band led by a guy who was born in Israel and grew up in New Jersey. I love heartbreaking music."

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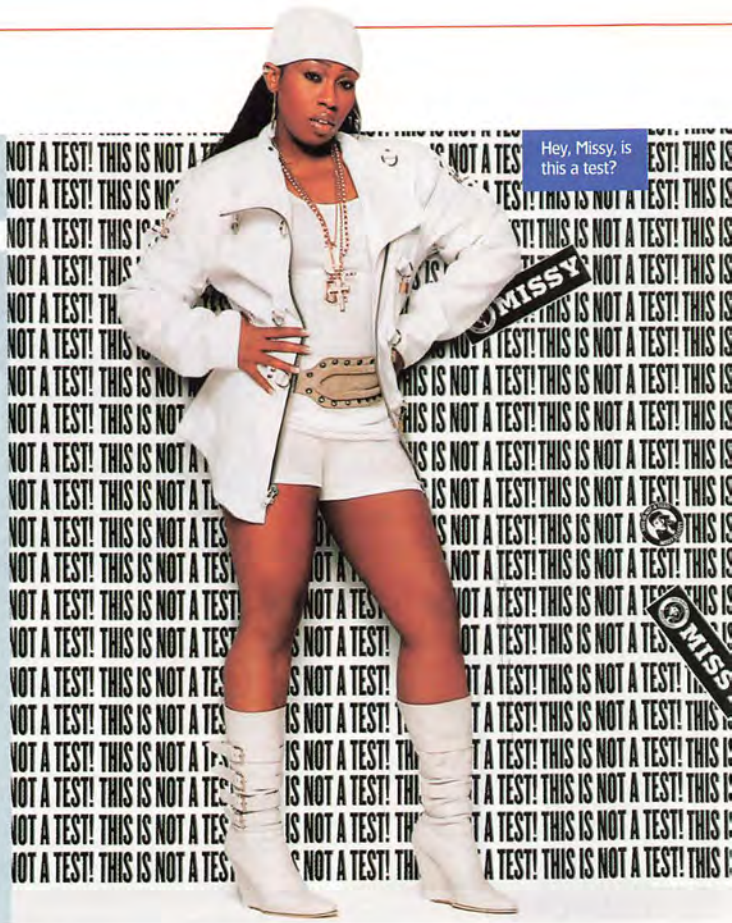
BEAT GOES ON

Hip-hop's restless explorer can't find herself on fifth album



Hey, Missy, is this a test?

MISSY ELLIOTT

THIS IS NOT A TEST ✪✪✪

GOLD MIND/ELEKTRA

MISSY ELLIOTT IS hip-hop's brain. With Timbaland, she crafts some of the genre's most experimental yet irresistibly danceable hits, fusing old-school influences and newfound sounds as if she were both a historian and a scientist. But Elliott's personality is less nuanced than her music. *This Is Not a Test,* her fifth album, lacks feeling — besides beats, what else does she care about?

The simple answer is Aaliyah. After the young diva's fatal 2001 plane crash, she has been memorialized in every Elliott video. In the dark album opener, "Baby Girl Interlude," Elliott, backed by a muted Mary J. Blige, once again remembers her friend. Singing with the blend of pain and determination Blige is famous for, Elliott declares, "I've learned to love those while they're still awake."

In other words, she wants to celebrate life no matter what's on her mind. The next song, "Pass That Dutch," teems with familiar sounds made exotic: jump-ropers' claps, car-alarm bleats, galloping horses, even an awards-show speech and applause. "I'll give you five seconds to catch your breath," Elliott sasses.

There are beats here that could knock the wind out of you: "Wake Up" (featuring a laid-back Jay-Z) is underpinned by a huge, spacey thump, and "Pump It Up" (with a jittery Nelly) incorporates a sharp rattle like you might hear in the car when the bass is cranked up.

Panting duets with a typically frank R. Kelly and a disinterested Fabolous sound stiff by comparison. The sexiest numbers are the staccato "Keep It Movin'," thanks to Elephant Man's unintelligible but deftly rhythmic guest spot, and Elliott's ode to her vibrator, the perky, Parliament-grooved "Toyz." If that's what turns her on, she may never let us get to know her better. *NICK CATUCCI*

MISSY ELLIOTT'S CURRENT LISTENING

- **MARY J. BLIGE** LOVE & LIFE *GEFFEN*
- **BEYONCÉ** DANGEROUSLY IN LOVE *COLUMBIA*

GET 'EM IN THE MOOD

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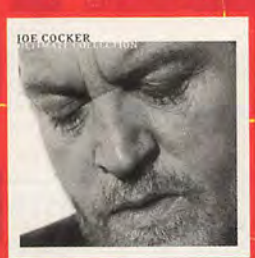
THE TEMPTATIONS
Love Songs
Just Your Imagination, Running Away With You
(In Stores 1/13)



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Guaranteed To Get You "Feelin' Alright"
(In Stores 1/13)

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The No. 1's
Good Antidote For A "Love Hangover"
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CARPENTERS
Gold – 35th Anniversary Edition [2 CDs]
Their Songs Always Bring Out The Feeling
(In Stores 2/10)

I ♥ MUSIC

their imaginations, carving out an odd, insular little fantasy world. Their band name is a *Star Wars* reference, and their music could be dubbed Narnia-pop: Singer-songwriter Stacy (the youngest at 15, she leads two sisters, a brother and a neighborhood friend) looks and sounds like something straight out of British fabulist C.S. Lewis. Here she plays Alice, guiding us through a misty, minor-key Wonderland populated by scores of "Marvelous Things" — mermaids, horses that grow from the ground, bats with butterfly wings and two-part harmonies that swoop and soar. Dorky? Sure. But with songs this full of imagination and existential yearning, Eisley can hoard their 36-sided dice and Magic cards with pride.

JOSH EELLS

EXPLOSIONS IN THE SKY

THE EARTH IS NOT A COLD DEAD PLACE ✪✪

TEMPORARY RESIDENCE

Texas rockers suck the life from long, melodramatic instrumentals

Ever watched the last scene of a Western again and again? That's the effect of listening to Explosions in the Sky's third album. The inexorable nine-minute opener, "First Breath After Coma," is the perfect accompaniment for a slow pullback from the weeping heroine to the entire Mojave desert: A few clean-toned, haunting notes build into a full-band hurricane; everything quiets down, then rises and falls again. So far, so good: Even if bands like Scottish college-rock favorites Mogwai have done similar things with more wit and audacity, it punches some basic tension/release buttons. But then the quartet fills out the album by executing almost exactly the same formula four more times — same pacing, same tone, same length — and the dramatic shock wears off quickly.

DOUGLAS WOLK

FABOLOUS

MORE STREET DREAMS PT. 2: THE MIXTAPE ✪✪

DESERT STORM/ELEKTRA

The pretty-boy crown prince of hip-hop returns to the streets, feels like a tourist

Rising from the scrambling world of mix tapes to a major-label record deal in 2001, Fabolous became the kind of up-from-under success story that has made hip-hop the new American dream. His biggest hits have been crossover duets with R&B chanteuses, so this bootleg-style hodgepodge of hard-edged new material and re-appropriated beats is his "I'm still 'hood" manifesto. John Jackson has a youthful, pugnacious flow and a proud Brooklyn accent that fits most of these 14 East Coast tracks like a glove. He clearly models himself after Biggie and Jay-Z, but while he can write a great punch line ("Why wouldn't I get dome from her/When the digits on my checks look like phone numbers?" he asks on "Make U Mine"), he's too much of a novice to give his street corner-to-stretch Cadillac themes the gravity or dizzying variation of his influences. Without those, his flashy brags start sounding like so much hot air.

NELSON GEORGE

I LOVE THIS CD!

ANNA FARIS
ACTRESS IN *SCARY MOVIE 3* AND *LOST IN TRANSLATION*

YO LA TENGO
SUMMER SUN
MATADOR

"I've always been a fan of Yo La Tengo. They're a rock band, but they've got a little something different going on that nobody else has."

THE FLAMING LIPS

EGO TRIPPING AT THE GATES OF HELL ✪✪✪

WARNER BROS.

Wayne Coyne & Co. provide a one-stop shop for fans of jazz, prog-rock and very long song titles

Inspiring the title of an episode of *Dawson's Creek*, this EP boasts no fewer than four new songs, in addition to the already released "Ego Tripping" (plus two remixes of the same) and a minimalist electro-funk version of 2002's virtually omnipresent "Do You Realize??" Frontman Wayne Coyne has described "Sunship Balloons" as "Yes meets John Coltrane," which is about right even if the song doesn't quite prove why they *should* meet. The description could apply equally to the pleasant, if laboriously titled, jazz instrumental "I'm a Fly in a Sunbeam (Following the Funeral Procession of a Stranger)." Far superior are the strings-laden opener, "Assassination of the Sun,"

Opposite page: Warwick Saint. This page: Jean-Paul Aussenard/WireImage.com

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[CD + Bonus Disc]
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TOM JONES
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LIONEL RICHIE
Truly: The Love Songs
Someone Who Knows About
"All Night Long"

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and the electronica-minded closer, "A Chance at Christmas (Say It Isn't So)" — even if it's little consolation for the ongoing lack of the Lips' long-awaited movie project, *Christmas on Mars*.

CLARK COLLIS

FLOETRY

FLOACISM "LIVE" ✪✪✪

DREAMWORKS

U.K. duo moves to America, arises from its slumber

Unlike most diaspora Brits who identify with American R&B, the North London duo Floetry took the radical step of relocating to soul cities — first Atlanta, now Philadelphia — and won enough respect to write songs for rising neo-soulists Jill Scott and Bilal and for falling pop king Michael Jackson. Sexy but also safe, last year's debut, *Floetic*, won lots of awards-show approval. This live-and-more follow-up seems to be a repackaging time-filler, front-loaded with three polite new studio tracks, including one featuring cred-bestowing rap maverick Mos Def. But in fact, it corrects the first release by adding spontaneity and by showcasing Marsha Ambrosius's often brilliant vocals, which improve the more she dominates Natalie Stewart's self-righteous flows. Together they elevate somewhat clichéd lyrics ("If I Was a Bird") and raise "Butterflies" from the grave of Jackson's album *Invincible*. They've earned a green card.

JAMES HANNAHAM

The Flaming Lips: "Is that dandruff on your shoulder, Wayne?"

HANOI ROCKS

TWELVE SHOTS ON THE ROCKS ✪✪

LIQUOR AND POKER

Glammed-out Finns come back, but their lipstick gleams less brightly

Hanoi Rocks' early-'80s gutter-punk was held together with outlandish attitude and eyelash glue, and they inspired much of the Sunset Strip — including Guns N' Roses — to follow their leather-and-lace lead before their 1985 breakup. *Twelve Shots* reunites only singer Michael Monroe and guitarist Andy McCoy, and vintage corkers like "Delirious" and "Watcha Want" could provide ample repeat-play fodder for those who have worn out their Darkness album. But when Monroe snarls "On radio and MTV, you need people like me," it's hard not to wonder if he's heralding his bad-boy cred or pleading for a camera's eye to fall on him. That inversion of the classic sleaze-rock pose of craving attention but not really caring about getting it — not to mention a couple of bloated ballads — drags *Twelve Shots* out of the lipstick-and-liquor stratosphere and back down a little closer to earth.

MAURA JOHNSTON

ASTONISHING FACT! >>

JA RULE once lost more than $50,000 at Australia's Crown Casino — then passed out autographed $50 bills to fans.

HOOBASTANK

THE REASON ✪✪✪

ISLAND

Solid follow-up successfully avoids the pun "Hoobastinks"

Hoobastank are pretty smart for a group of hard-rock crybabies with a horrible name. The California quartet's lack of pretension and less-than-turgid beats ("Escape" even gallops like Golden Earring's "Twilight Zone") make every song on *The Reason* sound like a future airwaves monolith worthy of following their hits "Crawling in the Dark" and "Running Away" onto a catalog-churning best-of. This consistency doesn't make them anything more than anonymous radio angst merchants, but these odes to frustration are infinitely more tolerable than most; thankfully, singer Douglas Robb can emote without sounding like a violent donkey. It's too early to know whether these guys are this decade's Journey (not an insult!), but they're contenders.

ANTHONY MICCIO

ENRIQUE IGLESIAS

7 ✪✪✪

INTERSCOPE

Son of Julio locks his hold on American women's groins

"The Way You Touch Me," "Break Me Shake Me," "You Rock Me" — they all sound as, um, classic as their names. It might be hard to understand why a Spanish schlock-pop scion, after six records leveraging his Latin lover's leer and lilt into celestial sales, galactic

BLOODY BUDDIES

50 Cent and posse toast the fly life — but can't shake the streets

G-UNIT

BEG FOR MERCY ✪✪✪

SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE

>> IGNORE FOR A moment the effervescent pop hits "In da Club" and "21 Questions." What 50 Cent *really* brought back to hip-hop in 2003 was melancholy. Most of his debut — songs like "Back Down" and "Many Men (Wish Death)," which saturated urban radio without poking through on MTV — played like thug lamentations of the highest order, haggard and grim.

Considering how successful 50 Cent was last year — selling 6 million albums — he's earned the right to the glamour-happy, brand name-dropping "Stunt 101," the first single from his extended G-Unit family (50, Lloyd Banks, Young Buck and Tony Yayo, who is unable to tour because he's in jail for gun possession). As on 50's breakthrough, though, that single belies the darkness of his group's debut.

Peel away the rote celebrations of glimmer and girls ("Smile," "Baby U Got"), and 50 & Co. sound just as preoccupied with the streets. On the run-of-the-mill revenge tale "Eye for Eye," 50 inveighs against the haters: "I'll blow your brains on my *New York Times*/Run off/Turn to the sports section and read your mind." On "G'd Up," a stark Dr. Dre beat — employing tolling bells and mournful piano — carries lackluster verses from the crew.

50's signature wit is notably absent, so the fate of G-Unit hinges largely on his posse. On the James Bond-style title track, Banks matches humor with violence: "We tired of you niggas with your maybe beef/We gon' be here forever/You temporary, like baby teeth."

On the excellent "Footprints," where producer Nottz expertly chops up a gospel sample and flutes, Young Buck proves fiery: "Every day's a death threat/But I ain't dead yet." It's that resilience that made 50 so compelling and makes *Beg for Mercy*, at its best, play like a document of struggle, not a celebration of success. Hunger becomes them. *JON CARAMANICA*

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE!

>> **DIPLOMATS** *DIPLOMATIC IMMUNITY* ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM

>> **MOBB DEEP** *THE INFAMOUS* LOUD

> 50 Cent's signature wit is notably absent.

superstardom and the sidekick role in an Antonio Banderas film, would want to sound like this. The answer is, because he has insightfully understood that the world *does* in fact need a lot more crazy-slick deracinated pop-rock, and the Outfield aren't coming back — nor can we expect another Andrew Ridgeley solo album. Happily, Enrique Iglesias is tremendously good at this, and we are happy. Plus, he remains very attractive, and that is a huge plus.

RENE VIENET

JA RULE

BLOOD IN MY EYE ✪✪

MURDER INC./DEF JAM

An unconvincing return to gangsta life on gruff MC's 50 Cent–baiting fifth CD

PLAYA-HATA ALERT

Ja Rule gave only one interview while promoting his latest album, to Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, claiming he wanted to patch things up with 50 Cent. Well, so much for that idea: The revenge obsession here is stifling. *Blood in My Eye* consists almost entirely of antagonistic digs at 50, Eminem and Dr. Dre, none of which are terribly sharp ("I'm-a find out/Where Em Laden's hiding and bomb him"). To prove there's muscle behind the taunts — and likely in response to 50's needling that lover-man Ja was just a big softie — he scraps his chart-topping, thug-lovin' duet side altogether (or maybe his hitmaking partner Ashanti, totally absent here, scrapped *him*). Poor Ja — he's ridiculed as a lover, clawless as a fighter.

BEN SISARIO

Enrique Iglesias: Still wearing Julio's hand-me-downs

KELIS

TASTY ✪✪✪✪

STAR TRAK/ARISTA

Neptunes hook girl turned solo star mixes sugar and spice on her latest — and best

The title of Kelis's new single, "Milkshake," is her euphemism for a woman's, er, double-scooped treats, and like the innuendo of its atonal refrain ("My milkshake brings all the boys to the yard"), her third album delivers on its confectionary teases. What Kelis lacks in R&B pipes, she makes up for with the supersize sass she's brought to countless Neptunes-produced hooks (ODB's "Got Your Money," Busta Rhymes's "What It Is"): She's as good playing a hair-twisting, gum-popping tart on "Sugar Honey Iced Tea" as an all-grown-up cock-blocker on the crackling funk ditty "Trick Me." Throughout, she leaves mentors Pharrell Williams and Chad Hugo for the warm embrace of soul merchants Raphael Saadiq, Dallas Austin and Outkast's André 3000 (the playful "Millionaire"): It's a declaration of independence, and she pulls it off stunningly.

JOSEPH PATEL

MARK LANEGAN BAND

HERE COMES THAT WEIRD CHILL (METHAMPHETAMINE BLUES, EXTRAS AND ODDITIES) ✪✪✪

BEGGARS BANQUET

Lethal drugs and industrial blues mean above-par leftovers from a grunge graduate

On an EP heavy with outtakes from a forthcoming album, ex–Screaming Trees singer Mark Lanegan mashes together his obsessions: bad drugs,

I LOVE THIS CD!

DAVID CARRADINE
ACTOR IN *KILL BILL VOLS. 1 AND 2*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN
THE RISING
COLUMBIA

"He's the only guy moving forward from Bob Dylan. I keep going back to Bruce because he keeps surprising me. And he's such a real guy."

Opposite page, from top: courtesy of Warner Bros.; Mary Ellen Matthews. This page, from left: Alan Sillen; Jeffrey Mayer/Wirelmage.com

Hello!

[adult swim]

TM & © 2003 Cartoon Network.

scratchy 78-rpm blues singles and the industrial clang of Tom Waits. Caught in the grip of "Methamphetamine Blues," he just wants to prolong the high over a churning factory beat. A cover of Captain Beefheart's "Clear Spot" oozes primordial aggression, and even when the singer blisses out on "Message to Mine," he sounds vaguely sinister, as though he's recounting some illicit tryst in an opium den. "Don't mind being stoned; they say Jesus was," he croons on the deathbed piano ballad "Lexington Slow Down." Only "Skeletal History," with Lanegan's sometime bandmates Queens of the Stone Age, fails to sustain the dramatic tension.

GREG KOT

CYNDI LAUPER

AT LAST ✪✪✪

EPIC

The auteur of "Time After Time" cleans up her usual act to do a cruise-ship cocktail hour

'80s POP ICON GOES CLASSY

On flippant '80s bonbons like "Girls Just Want to Have Fun," Cyndi Lauper presented herself as a flamboyant siren who made virtues of her battery-acid voice and bulldog phrasing. So it's something of a shock to hear her slink plaintively through Burt Bacharach's elegant "Walk on By," transform the Zodiacs' "Stay" into a street-corner Latin revue and spin the bluesy "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood" into a resolute Vegas-belter theme song. Lauper picks great songs and tremendous guests (" 'Til You Come Back to Me" features a sparkling Stevie Wonder harmonica solo), and she has learned how to shape a phrase without spilling excess guts all over it. Not every track is a gem — somebody should have steered her away from the cover-proof songs "La Vie En Rose" and "Unchained Melody" — but most of the time, *At Last* accomplishes both usual goals of similar classic-songs sets: to erase the taint of errant previous projects and to resuscitate an otherwise long-dormant career.

TOM MOON

LINKIN PARK

LIVE IN TEXAS ✪✪✪

WARNER BROS.

America's biggest rock band re-creates its hits for pissed-off Texans

Their debut, *Hybrid Theory*, sold more copies than any other album in 2000, so it only makes sense that California sextet Linkin Park play to a Texas-size audience on this unnecessary live album. The excellent set list is split between the hits on that disc and *Meteora*, their second full-length, released last spring. You'd be hard-pressed to tell these perfectly executed performances apart from their studio versions. On "Crawling," which established the band's closely followed formula, especially hushed verses emphasize the convulsive, bombastic chorus. Keening vocalist Chester Bennington, tantrum-throwing kid to reserved MC Mike Shinoda's cool teenager, lets the crowd scream the hook. Belted by a chorus of thousands, "These wounds/They will not heal" sounds like a good enough reason to hear these songs again.

NICK CATUCCI

MADONNA

REMIXED AND REVISITED ✪✪

MAVERICK/WARNER BROS.

Deposed Queen of Pop's *American Life* has no second act on remix quickie

The Maternal Girl's seven-track semi comes too soon for a stopgap (indeed, she is contractually barred from stopping the Gap) but too late to clear fans' palates of the sour *American Life*. Mostly, it's just a bad aftertaste. The only stroke of genius is a remix of "American Life" by American DJ Headcleanr, redoubling the notoriously lame rap and riding it down a generic thrash, middle fingers waving. Chutzpah! An old hat, old hit-cum-advertising soundtrack and "new song" follow, after the ill-conceived inclusion of the live Britney/Xtina/Missy VMA four-way on "Like a Virgin/Hollywood" (rather tragic without the video track). Perhaps Madonna's hoping to be confused with one of them. She should be so lucky; the greatest star in history is now just a kiss away from settling into the role of "the American Kylie Minogue."

RENE VIENET

Jay-Z: Great rapper, terrible decorator

CURTAIN CALL

The "Michael Jordan of mic recording" retires — he says

JAY-Z

THE BLACK ALBUM ✪✪✪✪

ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM

WHO IS JAY-Z kidding? With his ninth album, the Brooklyn MC and self-appointed King of New York swears he's throwing in the towel. Please. Tupac's dead, and he still releases five double albums a year. Except for Ma$e, MCs don't retire: They fall off, they make comeback records or they costar in romantic comedies with Steve Martin.

Then again, Jay-Z insists he's not an average rapper. He's called himself the best since his second album, and his insistence that the game stops now, on his say-so, is another way of proving he's the biggest playa of all.

On "December 4th," his mom offers fond spoken-word memories of his youth. He sketches childhood scenes, from banging out rhymes at his kitchen table to partnering with a coke dealer named "Spanish Jose" — all to distract himself from the "demons" his errant father left behind. It's detailed, warm and totally pompous. But feather-puffing is what Jay-Z does better than anyone.

Here, he flaunts typically breezy wordplay ("Now it's a duet/You wet when you check out the technique/From the two techs," he taunts on "Threat," his consonants clicking like a cocking pistol), musical bombast (the rap-rock roar of "99 Problems," produced by Rick Rubin) and megalomania ("I'm like Che Guevara with bling on," he declares on "Public Service Announcement"). On "My 1st Song," the closer, the brags drop away: "The song that I sing to you is my everything," he swears, lancing his last syllable with regret. From a guy who has suggested that rap is a means to extravagant ends, it's an affecting confession.

"Even James Dean couldn't resist the allure/Of dying young, leaving a good-looking corpse," Jay intones on "Allure." With *The Black Album*, he wants to pull the plug in his prime and keep his legacy undimmed: This is Jay-Z's suicide note and his glowing eulogy rolled into one. *JONAH WEINER*

JAY-Z'S CURRENT LISTENING

- **OUTKAST** SPEAKERBOXXX/THE LOVE BELOW *ARISTA*
- **COLDPLAY** A RUSH OF BLOOD TO THE HEAD *CAPITOL*

DAVE MATTHEWS BAND

THE CENTRAL PARK CONCERT ✪✪✪

BAMA RAGS/RCA

Fifth live set from the smartest jam band in the world

Because the Dave Matthews Band is legendary as a live act, its singles have been underrated. Playing for free in front of 85,000 people (and just as many Hacky Sacks), DMB balance pop instincts and jammy impulses in this three-hour set. The three discs include vigorous renditions of lovely ballads like the frankly sexual "Crush," stretched to a surprisingly fleeting 11 minutes; the oddly romantic apocalypse fantasy "When the World Ends" (the pot reference "We'll be burning one" gets special crowd-pleasing emphasis); and the sweet nostalgia trip "Stay (Wasting Time)." Leisurely solo-and-scat breaks bring staples "Two Step" and "Jimi Thing" well past the patience-testing 15-minute mark, and a cover of Neil Young's heartbreaking classic "Cortez the Killer" lacks the original's dark edge. But for every extended indulgence, there's a mini-pop masterpiece.

NICK CATUCCI

THE MEKONS

PUNK ROCK ✪✪✪

QUARTERSTICK

Old British radicals celebrate anniversary by relearning old songs

There are no new songs on *Punk Rock*, just new live and studio performances generated by the nominally alt-country radicals' 2002 twenty-fifth-anniversary tour, when they got their mad fans out to successive shows devoted to successive phases of their multifarious career. It's no surprise that the Mekons of 1977 were as besotted with the Sex Pistols as every conscious young Briton. The surprise is that the realist rage of material they had barely thought about in years feels so right in the age of Dubya. The tunes that enliven memorable punk don't magically materialize

Jonathan Mannion

now. But as writing — as examples of articulated rage — the likes of "Corporal Chalkie" and "I'm So Happy" were why cell leaders Jon Langford and Tom Greenhalgh chose rock & roll. And why they choose it still.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

STEPHIN MERRITT

PIECES OF APRIL ✪✪

NONESUCH

Soundtrack to a Katie Holmes movie features New York songwriting wizard in several guises

In 1999, Stephin Merritt masterminded the last great monument of twentieth-century pop, the Magnetic Fields' three-CD *69 Love Songs*. This brief, budget-priced, 10-song soundtrack-cum-artist sampler is never better than on two of those 69, "I Think I Need a New Heart" and "The Luckiest Guy on the Lower East Side," though "You You You You You," by the 6ths (the second of Merritt's four bands) comes close. The five new songs all feature Merritt's meaningfully inexpressive monotone, shrewdly minimal arrangements and flatly clever lyrics. But only "Dreams Anymore," about a disillusioned beloved living in a nowhere town, achieves the epiphany-in-spite-of-itself that propels a good 50 of the aforementioned 69 beyond the devotion to craft that often seems his only reason for creating.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

MOBY

18 B-SIDES + DVD ✪✪✪

V2

Bald electronica wizard collects the so-so outtakes that didn't make his so-so last album

This is the sound of downtime Moby, Moby when he's not orchestrating disco destruction or protesting turkey destruction. Mostly, *18 B-Sides* is familiar-sounding odds and ends — drones with a gospel sample overlaid, moody beats with cute hats on top, stuff better than your average techno but less than a proper Moby CD. There's nothing as boombastic as 2002's "We Are All Made of Stars." Of the four new tunes, "Afterlife" is the best, a bubbling, building mix of tense guitar and old-school Atari blips. Moby might have put as much time and effort into the bonus DVD, which features him writing a complete song, a whole live show and some 80 minutes of *Moby TV*. Remote control not included.

RJ SMITH

I LOVE THIS CD!

HALLE BERRY
ACTRESS IN *GOTHIKA* AND *CATWOMAN*

NORAH JONES
FIRST SESSIONS
BLUE NOTE

"I'm still not tired of this album even after two years. Her music is very melodic and easy on my ears, and it's really soothing to me."

NEBULA

ATOMIC RITUAL ✪✪✪

LIQUOR AND POKER

Heavier-than-heaven power trio goes nova but can't match live firepower

Back in 1997, Nebula guitarist Eddie Glass and drummer Ruben Romano left stoner-rock lifers Fu Manchu to explore a more overtly psychedelic brand of guitar fission. Produced by heavy-rock expert Chris Goss (of metal cultists Masters of Reality), Nebula's sun-size whump never strays too far from its roots in '60s and '70s hard rock. The group's third full album seems to get more Zeppelin by the song: "The Beast" owes its life to "When the Levee Breaks," while "The Way to Venus" and "Electric Synapse" crackle with Jimmy Page–esque verve. *Atomic Ritual* grooves with charge and power, but like many of their fellow bong-lifters, Nebula have yet to capture their earthshaking live swagger on record.

JOE GROSS

Their mission accomplished, Nebula return to the '70s.

From left: Steve Granitz/Wireimage.com; courtesy of Liquor and Poker

How are you?

[adult swim]

TM & © 2003 Cartoon Network.

NU

ALPHABRAVOSHOCKPOPDISCO ✪✪✪

UNIVERSAL

Exuberant Danes make formidable, fluffy debut

There's nothing new about NU — but like other Scandinavians (the Hives, the Sounds, the Raveonettes), they reconfigure their influences into dazzling shapes. Fronted by blond (of course), candy-voiced vixen Stine Jacobsen and staffed by a trio of Danes named Lars, Morten and Peter, NU unapologetically deliver style over substance (the album's cover art features bubblegum). Throwaway lyrics ("Dancing is cute and kissing is fun") bounce playfully over genre-hopping pop that throws slide guitar together with perky '80s synths and an occasional hard-rock riff. The exuberant *ooh-ooh-oohs* of "Disco Hurts" sound like the Go-Go's genetically spliced with the Dandy Warhols. Only the cloying, Aqua-on-amphetamines "Factory Girl" misses the mark. Fortunately, it's the last song — and the party's been too much fun to hold it against them.

APRIL LONG

ONEIDA

SECRET WARS ✪✪✪

JAGJAGUWAR

Sixth album from demolition derby–loving Brooklyn trio

NOISY HIPSTER MADMEN!

Oneida are like the Xena, Warrior Princess of indie-rock: They're as pretty as they are tough. On *Secret Wars*, the stalwart New York noise trio takes cues from forebears Sonic Youth and the Velvet Underground, teasing hypnotic grooves and pretty melodies from a clamorous mess. Thank Hanoi Jane, the band's male singer-guitarist: Throughout, he coos and murmurs, offering a smooth counterpoint to the band's nervous, jumpy rhythms and surface noise (the raw, pounding "Treasure Plane," the droning epic "Changes in the City"), while his intricate, helixed riffs bring mesmerizing textures to "The Last Act, Every Time." Oneida are currently writing the soundtrack for a demolition-derby documentary, but they're as concerned with beauty as they are with destruction: This is a Porsche trapped in a monster truck's body.

NICK CATUCCI

Katy Rose: "Why, yes, miss — we *can* spare some change."

PRESTON SCHOOL OF INDUSTRY

MONSOON ✪✪

MATADOR

Second solo album by Pavement second-stringer is a mess of mumbles and flat pop

Pavement, Scott Kannberg's former band, were the Beatles of indie-rock. Together they made a quirky symphony, but since they disbanded in 1999, the solo projects have been anticlimactic. Where frontman Stephen Malkmus has delved deeper into surrealism and boogie-rock, second-in-command Kannberg (a.k.a. Spiral Stairs, a.k.a. Preston School of Industry) pursues earnest indie-pop. *Monsoon* is full of *ba-ba-ba* choruses and meandering rhythms: "Line It Up" and "Get Your Crayons Out!" sport bursts of feedback and alternately spazzy and laconic tempos, a lame echo of Pavement's lo-fi sound. The country jangles of "Caught in the Rain" and "Tone It Down" are more tuneful, but even *Monsoon*'s best moments are marred by barely audible vocals and dull lyrical abstractions: "Where are you now?" Kannberg asks on the opening track. "Trying to be the furnace sun?" Come again?

ALEC HANLEY BEMIS

KATY ROSE

BECAUSE I CAN ✪✪✪✪

V2

A 16-year-old girl's talent blooms in California

A springtime blossom of inner conflict, the delightful Tarzana, California–raised Katy Rose may look tuff in her publicity stills. And her jaded lyrics — "They all come here to find a scene/But end up

From top: Gabrielle Revere; Michael Lavine

STAB AT FAME

Wacko rap phenom readies the British hip-hop invasion

DIZZEE RASCAL

BOY IN DA CORNER ✪✪✪✪

XL/MATADOR

IF THE STREETS — whose 2002 debut warmed America to Brit-hop with its tales of everyday lower-middle-class situations — is England's Eminem, then Dizzee Rascal is its 50 Cent. Stabbed five times last July at a club, he has confessed to stealing cars and robbing pizza deliverymen. Not Curtis Jackson's rap sheet, exactly, but pretty hard-knock, especially from a country whose most famous criminal is Professor Moriarty.

But this 19-year-old does more than give the U.K. thug cred: His hard-edged, dance-inflected debut makes East London sound like the new Dirty South. As Missy Elliott and Mannie Fresh proved in the late '90s, working outside of hip-hop's geographical radar can make for some of its wildest convention-tweaking.

Here, Rascal (born Dylan Mills) opens hip-hop to skewed rhythms influenced by U.K. garage house, fresh slang (he calls toilets *loos*; it's anyone's guess what *wahgwan* means) and an accent so colorful he makes Chingy sound like Ben Stein.

Self-produced, *Boy in da Corner* is a chaos of shrill synthetic sounds, distorted bass and beats that don't just stutter — like Dizzee himself, they tic and burst as though they've got Tourette's. Lyrically, he traffics in fairly familiar gangsta stuff: numb despair, cheeky brags (the pounding "Fix Up, Look Sharp"), glimpses of hope and gun lust. Rascal channels Biggie's menace on "Cut 'Em Off" ("Kick off your door, I ain't got a 4-4/Naw, I'll have to settle for a long metal bar") and Tupac Shakur's optimism on "Brand New Day."

It's his delivery — think Ol' Dirty Bastard's unhinged sob tackling Busta Rhymes's speedy syncopations — that really shakes things up. On "I Luv U," he tells the story of a defiant pops-to-be and his baby mama, but the rhymes switch perspectives recklessly, from girl to girl's friend to boy to Rascal mid-verse. He's only an ocean away, but this kid sounds like an extraterrestrial.

JONAH WEINER

DIZZEE RASCAL'S CURRENT LISTENING

- **LUDACRIS** CHICKEN-N-BEER *DISTURBING THA PEACE/DEF JAM SOUTH*
- **THREE 6 MAFIA** DA UNBREAKABLES *COLUMBIA*

> Dizzee Rascal is England's 50 Cent.

girls on Methedrine/Naked on a TV screen" — may be sophisticated by any age standard. But the very real pleasure of her irresistible, hard-ass pop style — garage-rock with an undertone of symphonica and a dash of singer-songwriter balladry — is not in her admittedly marketable dark-thoughts-for-dark-times attitude, but in the soaring sound of youth and talent engaged in the self-expression that both demand. Rose is the daughter of two musicians — her father, a keyboardist who toured with '70s hit-makers Poco and Crosby, Stills & Nash, produced the record. Like her Top 40 contemporaries, she's as catchy as can be, if not a little catchier. But unlike them, she's indisputably the real deal.

MIM UDOVITCH

MINDY SMITH

ONE MOMENT MORE ✪✪✪

VANGUARD

Debut album from 31-year old American sprite

Upon first listen, Mindy Smith's enraptured soprano — clear as fresh water and jumping wide intervals like a mountain yodel — sounds like a much-needed evolution in neo-traditional country. That music has been held back by visible star Alison Krauss, whose acclaimed records are brutally middle-aged. Raised on Long Island and in Knoxville, Tennessee, and currently championed by Krauss herself as well as Dolly Parton, Smith is the first of the post-Krauss wish fulfillers, and her debut album hovers between Union Station's humdrum grassroots country-pop and self-obsessed teen ballad-rock. On "Train Song," about a problem boyfriend, she even says the word *shit*. And on "Hard to Know," you get Smith's lovely voice in a near-punk two-step with fuzz guitars. Those steps outside the box are liberating; it's too bad she doesn't loiter there longer.

BEN RATLIFF

Jason Nevader/WireImage.com

I LOVE THIS CD!

HEIDI KLUM
THE MOST SUPER OF ALL SUPERMODELS

SEAL
SEAL IV
WARNER BROS.

"It was nice to hear from him again. His voice is so soulful and soothing. This was definitely an album worth waiting for."

STARS

HEART ✪✪✪✪

ARTS & CRAFTS

Canuck indie-poppers: alone on Valentine's Day and proud of it

The band is called Stars, their second album is called *Heart* and the liner notes include an unbelievably cloying note to listeners: "Thank you for dreaming with us." Luckily, these Montreal indie-rockers aren't really all that precious. Singers Torquil Campbell and Amy Millan use boy-girl harmonies to make a mockery of romance: In their world, the only thing scarier than love gone wrong is love gone right. On the title track, Campbell coasts along on a gentle drum-machine beat and a few piano notes while whispering, "Sometimes the TV is like a lover, singing softly as you fall asleep/You wake up in the morning and it's still there, adding up the things you'll never be." It's his decidedly paranoid version of domestic bliss.

KELEFA SANNEH

ASTONISHING FACT! >>
At a hotel this year, **DIZZEE RASCAL** took a stolen golf cart joyriding and then racked up about $3,600 in phone charges.

STARSAILOR

SILENCE IS EASY ✪✪

CAPITOL

Producing two songs for U.K. band's sophomore effort was Phil Spector's second-biggest mistake of 2003

Give a man a baby, and he thinks he understands the world. Starsailor's second album shapes the U.K. foursome's windswept anthems and melodic melo-dramas into something more dynamic, channeling the influences of Coldplay and the Verve into controlled cacophony ("Fidelity") and percussive, string-soaked pop ("Four to the Floor"). Problem is, 23-year-old frontman James Walsh remains the same sap despite exposure to the crazy genius of Phil Spector, back behind a recording console for the first time since 1980 (when he worked with the Ramones) to helm two undistinguished tracks. Walsh,

We're fine, thanks.

You are reading a message from Adult Swim, the brand that represents the late-night animated programming on Cartoon Network. Our animation is created specifically for adults. Some of it is comedy. Some of it is action. All of it is different.

Adult Swim is the outer fringe of the television universe. We stand here, all alone, and we say, "Great!" If you ask us, it is happy-making to not be where the others are. We are, in fact, committed to staying in this very spot.

Would you like to join us?

Over here is an attorney with wings, a superhero who hosts a talk show and a dancing wad of meat. Yes, we are an outpost. But when every third person you meet is auditioning for a reality program, aren't we all that's left? We'll just be right over here, thank you, and certain people among you have heeded the call. Some of them are steaming the milk in your latte. Some of them are delivering your overnight package. Some of them are trading your stocks. Be nice to all of them, for they can all use some extra sleep.

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[adult swim]
It has come to this.

Aaron Augenblick, Tim Heitz and Jon Wurster are members of Superchunk. ©2003 Cartoon Network. 2003_NOV_0268

who became a father in 2002, has the bearing of someone who thinks his insights into life and love are fresh, but mawkishness like "Some of us laugh/Some of us cry/Some of us smoke/Some of us lie/But it's all just the way that we cope with our lives" could have come straight from Dr. Phil.

JASON COHEN

ROD STEWART

AS TIME GOES BY . . . THE GREAT AMERICAN SONGBOOK VOLUME II ✪✪✪

J RECORDS

Middle-aged rake finds new life by selling middle-aged fogeys songs older than they are

Don't be cynical about Rod Stewart's latest career ploy. Sure, it cossets middle-aged fogeys who never mastered downloading. But don't you wish all has-beens would stop writing songs about their highly atypical lives, or, worse still, handing the job to hacks like Carole Bayer Sager or Desmond Child? If the old loverboy's gonna mouth words he doesn't mean, let Ira Gershwin and Lorenz Hart provide them. Stewart's no Willie Nelson, but on the inevitable successor to the 2 million–selling *Great American Songbook Volume I*, his insouciantly craggy tenor disrespects pop classics like "Time After Time," "Where or When" and "I Only Have Eyes for You" just enough to let them breathe again. And while these classics aren't as empyreal as anti-rock philistines claim, they're definitely worth getting to know.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

Rod Stewart: "OK, you can bring in the other Olsen twin now."

THE STREETS

ALL GOT OUR RUNNINS ✪✪✪

VICE

South London garage-rapper's mini-album revisits the "geezer" lifestyle

Before the Streets, the idea of an English white kid with a punk-poet take on rap was an absurdity worthy of Monty Python. But with the surprisingly successful *Original Pirate Material* (it sold more than 100,000 copies), MC Mike Skinner toured an engrossing demimonde of "geezers" and their pratfalls. This eight-track stopgap — available only online — is a bit short on ideas, though, revamping old tracks and sticking to type on four new ones. It's not totally a crime: The remixes appealingly beef up bedroom beats for drum & bass and two-step garage dance floors, while "Give Me Back My Lighter" is a great character assassination on a cheap friend ("I don't give to receive/But you seem to live to receive"). But on "Streets Score," Skinner sounds too self-conscious about his quasi-celebrity. It worked for a certain Detroit-born white boy; here it seems slightly like a dead end.

STEVE LOWE

THE UNDERTONES

GET WHAT YOU NEED ✪✪

SANCTUARY

Northern Ireland's pop-punk legends reconvene after 20 years away. But where's Feargal?

When the Undertones' singer, Feargal Sharkey, walked out in 1983, the rest of the band lost heart and split, ending a splendid run of pop-punk songs that distilled the giddiness of young love into thrillingly brisk singles. Sharkey eventually became a music-industry executive, while the rest have re-formed with a singer, Paul McLoone, from their hometown of Derry, Northern Ireland. The Mark II Undertones eschew the more experimental textures of their later career in favor of the straight-forward, Ramones-influenced style they began with, though they sound more like a road-toughened bar band than the excitable youths of yesterday. McLoone can mimic Feargal's nervy warble, so that is a nostalgic treat. But lost innocence? That's a tougher thing to recapture.

PAUL DU NOYER

I LOVE THIS CD!

EVAN RACHEL WOOD
ACTRESS IN *THIRTEEN* AND *THE MISSING*

RADIOHEAD
OK COMPUTER
CAPITOL

"This CD changed my life. It affected me so much. The lyrics are absolutely brilliant, and the album also had this whole new sound."

From top: courtesy of J Records; Gregg DeGuire/Wireimage.com; Kevin Winter

NO KIDDING

Usually funny rap-rocker holds the rap and cuts the comedy

KID ROCK

KID ROCK ✪✪

ATLANTIC

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE a few multiplatinum albums to destroy a guy's sense of humor. It happened to that born-again sourpuss Eminem, and now it's happened to another Detroit bigmouth, Kid Rock. With a self-titled album signaling that he really means it this time, Kid Rock is asking us to feel for him.

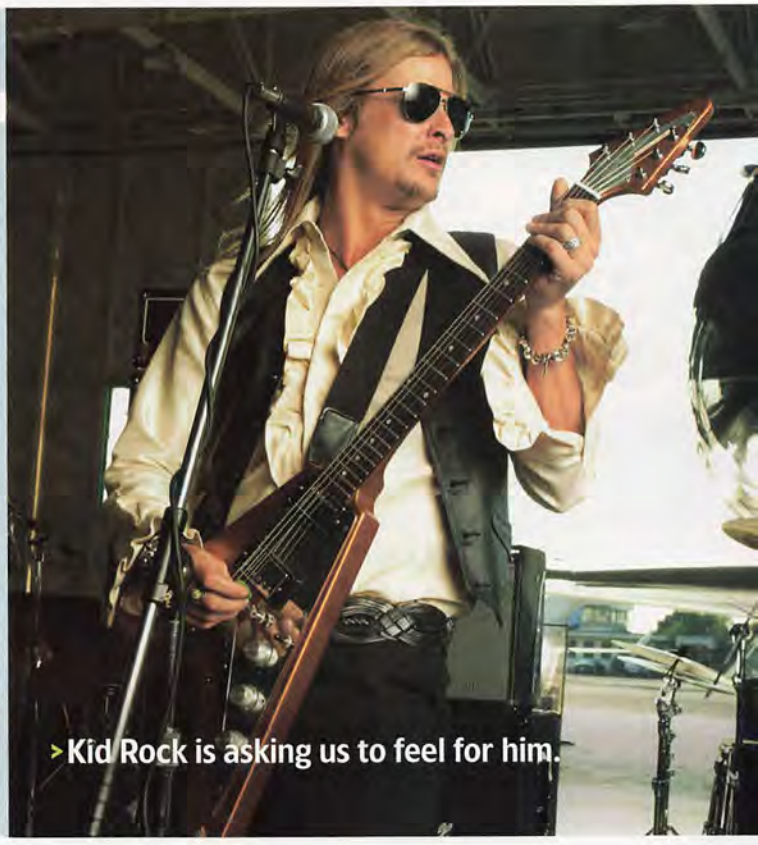
Laugh with him? Sure. Laugh at him? Sometimes. Gloat with him about his hard-earned success, his millions, his pneumatic girlfriend? OK. But sympathize with him about his time on the "Rock n' Roll Pain Train"? Puh-*leeze*. Someone else wants the seat.

Hip-hop now seems like it was a stepping stone to Kid Rock's true ambition: to play good old '70s Southern rock. His previous album, *Cocky*, switched to rock for its second half; on *Kid Rock*, he raps on only three of the 15 tracks, and to call them retreads would be to insult Goodyear. For the rest, he declares himself a "long-haired redneck rock & roll son of Detroit," pays attention to his singing and gets his band — his best investment — to do first-rate imitations of ZZ Top, Lynyrd Skynyrd, the Rolling Stones, Bob Seger and Jimi Hendrix.

He does a little of the old bragging, scoring some "Cadillac Pussy" as professional redneck Hank Williams Jr. growls along. Cowriter Sheryl Crow helps him land some zingers in "Run Off to L.A.," a kiss-off to an ex-girlfriend that rhymes *patience* with *high-maintenance*. But the bluster sounds halfhearted, because Kid Rock 2003 is determined to turn introspective. He complains about feeling "Cold and Empty"; he bemoans the plight of a "Single Father"; and on "Do It for You," he wails, "Times they change/Love it comes and goes/How I wished I could have shown you/How deep my love for you goes." With this kind of self-pity, Kid Rock was better off staying shallow. *JON PARELES*

KID ROCK'S CURRENT LISTENING

- **BILL WITHERS** LIVE AT CARNEGIE HALL *COLUMBIA/LEGACY*
- **J. GEILS BAND** FULL HOUSE LIVE *ATLANTIC*



Kid Rock is asking us to feel for him.

JOHN VANDERSLICE

CELLAR DOOR ✪✪✪

BARSUK

Grim Bay Area indie songsmith turns the gas on, sticks his head in the oven

Just how grim is John Vanderslice's fourth album? Well, the cheeriest tune is about heroin addiction. *Cellar Door* sets Vanderslice's harrowing, hyper-literate tales of war, death and family dysfunction to a jarring soundtrack: These songs don't rock; they squirm, shuffle and skulk. "Up Above the Sea," Vanderslice's chilly account of gunning down a bluebird, pulses over a stark synth progression that would fit gamely on a DMX record. The melancholic sweep of guitars, strings, organs and trumpet on "Pale Horse" and "Promising Actress" recall Elliott Smith's sour symphonies. But where Smith usually bailed his listeners out with reassuring Beatlesque pop hooks, Vanderslice leaves them swinging in the wind, offering no escape from the frustration and discomfort at the heart of these tunes.

DAVID PEISNER

LUTHER VANDROSS

LIVE: RADIO CITY MUSIC HALL 2003 ✪✪✪

J RECORDS

Sexy soul man reins it in on live set for lovers

Luther Vandross has been, at times, one of R&B's great vocal overachievers, serving as an almost impossible template for a younger generation of soul balladeers. With a silk-handkerchief tenor that never sounds strained, he's made even his most histrionic efforts sound effortless. Surprisingly, then, his first live set, recorded just before Valentine's Day 2003 — a stopgap release while he recovers from a near-fatal April stroke — comes off as a modest affair. His trademark songs "Here and Now," "A House Is Not a Home" and "Stop to Love," while potent, are delivered with uncharacteristic restraint. Best is a divine, loose-lipped 12-minute version of the Carpenters' soft-pop brooder "Superstar" that could teach Ruben Studdard, who released a version of the song as his debut single, a thing or two about singing for the moon.

JON CARAMANICA

VARIOUS ARTISTS

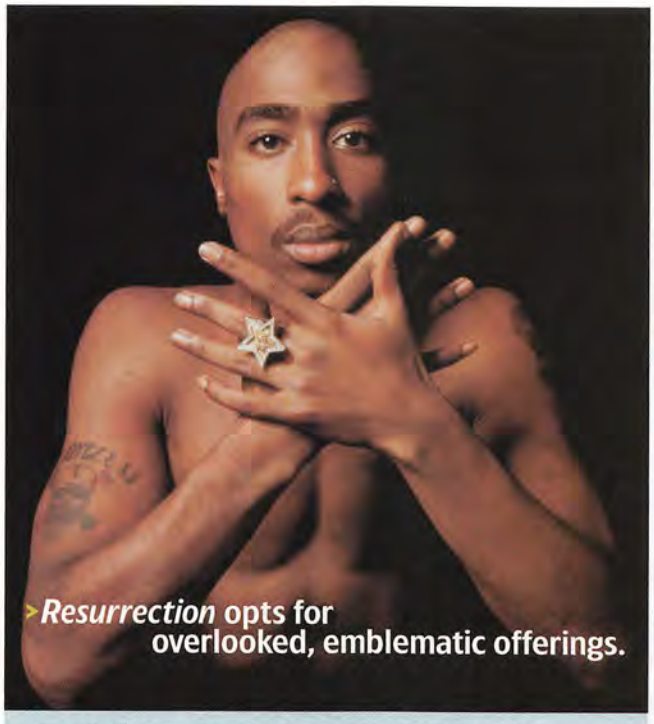
CONCERT FOR GEORGE ✪✪✪✪

WARNER STRATEGIC MARKETING

Homage to the Quiet Beatle, with a second CD of Indian-influenced songs

"This is a tribute to our beautiful friend," says Paul McCartney, his voice cracking

Danny Clinch/Corbis Outline



Resurrection opts for overlooked, emblematic offerings.

GHOST STORY

From wannabe to savior, the many faces of rap's great martyr

TUPAC

TUPAC: RESURRECTION ✪✪✪

AMARU/INTERSCOPE

RAPPER JADAKISS ONCE glibly observed that "dead rappers get better promotion." True enough. Since his murder in 1996, Tupac Shakur has proven more prolific and more profitable from the grave than he was from the studio. The past seven years have seen a fusillade of releases from the slain icon's vault material; in the past few months alone, there's been an invigorated bootleg collection (*Rap Phenomenon II*) and a vacuous remix effort (Death Row's *Nu-Mixx Klazzics*). Now, with the pillaging of Shakur's catalog seemingly coming to its predetermined end, the real work of canonizing the most enigmatic lightning rod of the '90s can begin.

Executive-produced by Pac's mother, Afeni Shakur, *Resurrection*, the soundtrack accompanying his officially sanctioned documentary, is eulogistic and unafraid to incorporate less-than-stellar performances in its attempt to present a portrait of the artist as a complex man. Though 1998's *Greatest Hits* remains the pinnacle anthology because of its anthemic numbers and signature moments of nihilism, *Resurrection* opts for more overlooked offerings that are just as emblematic. Included are his first commercial appearance, a quick cameo on Digital Underground's "Same Song," from 1990, and "Panther Power," taken from *Legends*, 1997's low-profile compilation of early demo material, on which he sounds like a young Chuck D.

There's a kernel of 2Pac's every incarnation — from unbridled gangsta ("Bury Me a G"), paranoid loose cannon ("Starin' at the World Through My Rearview"), savior of the black community ("Holla if You Hear Me") and rap upstart ("Rebel of the Underground"). Of the new material, the Eminem-produced Notorious B.I.G. duet "Runnin' (Dying to Live)" is a moving remake of a number that appeared on an off-the-radar compilation in 1995. Em lays down his most reverent vocals ever on "One Day at a Time," and his slow, simple musical turns on "Ghost" make for a haunting tribute.

On "The Realist Killaz," a song well-known to fans of bootlegs, 50 Cent introduces the song by declaring, "This is 2Pac!" — an implicit jibe at wannabe gangsta Ja Rule — and then 'Pac lets off a vitriol-filled verse. It's a reminder that he should be remembered as a war-ready loose cannon. *Resurrection* isn't a collection of unblemished hits, but rather of truthful pieces of the man. Yes, this is Tupac. *kris ex*

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- DMX — IT'S DARK AND HELL IS HOT *DEF JAM*
- N.W.A — STRAIGHT OUTTA COMPTON *RUTHLESS/PRIORITY*

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Chi-Lan Lieu hanging with Barenaked Ladies at Alcatraz

T-MOBILE'S ALL-ACCESS EXPERIENCE

★ ON A BRISK cool October evening, more than 2,000 people boarded specially chartered ferries in San Francisco to experience T-Mobile ALL ACCESS on the infamous island of Alcatraz. Once they arrived, they enjoyed a private concert with **Barenaked Ladies** and special guests **Train**. With one of the most amazing views of San Francisco imaginable, along with good food and plenty of Coca-Cola refreshments on hand, the night couldn't have been better. **Train** started the night off with a great performance that included some old classics such as "Meet Virginia" and "Drops of Jupiter." Then it was **Barenaked Ladies'** turn to close it out. They played some songs from their forthcoming album that made all the concertgoers eager for the new release. They also treated the crowd to a remix of "One Day" with a "Funky Chicken" twist to it. T-Mobile ALL ACCESS on Alcatraz Island — it doesn't get any better than this.

T··Mobile·
ALL ACCESS

with emotion as he introduces his version of George Harrison's signature love song, "Something." It's a typically touching moment on this dignified and affecting collection of 20 songs Harrison either wrote or loved, performed at London's Royal Albert Hall in November 2002, a year after the Beatles' guitarist succumbed to cancer. Harrison's friends' loving performances are note-perfect, sometimes eerily so. An immaculate "While My Guitar Gently Weeps," featuring Ringo Starr, Eric Clapton and McCartney, demonstrates that when it comes to vocal harmony, the Beatles bassist is peerless. But it's the set closer, "See You in My Dreams," a sentimental standard sung by Harrison's pal (and '50s guitar whiz) Joe Brown, that provides a tender intimacy the shy Harrison would surely have loved.

ANDY PEMBERTON

VARIOUS ARTISTS

STOP ME IF YOU THINK YOU'VE HEARD THIS ONE BEFORE . . . ✪✪✪

ROUGH TRADE

The British independent label Rough Trade's tribute album to itself

Nearly alone among great record labels, Rough Trade has never had an aesthetic more specific than the eccentric tastes of its founder, Geoff Travis, famed for his golden ears (he discovered the Smiths and the Strokes, as well as dozens of cult favorites). To celebrate the label's twenty-fifth anniversary, Travis has arranged for current artists to cover songs spanning its history. It's a strange project — the best Rough Trade bands rarely owe their predecessors much, and even the current crop doesn't seem comfortable looking backward. So the best performances here rip apart their sources and play with the ruins: Belle and Sebastian strap a gaudy electro-disco engine onto Young Marble Giants' subtle, elegiac "Final Day," and Brooklyn's piano-driven Fiery Furnaces lurch menacingly through the Fall's "Winter."

DOUGLAS WOLK

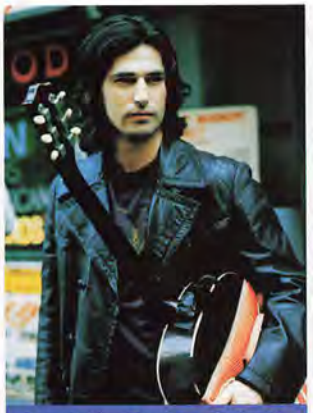
VARIOUS ARTISTS

TRAMPOLINE RECORDS GREATEST HITS VOL. II ✪✪✪

TRAMPOLINE

L.A. all-stars and also-rans celebrate rock's vintage sound

Something's missing from those dreamy, tousled-hair magazine photos of Pete Yorn — his halo. First, he released two of the best mainstream rock albums since Tom Petty wizened; now he wants to share the glory with every deserving indie-pop band in the L.A. basin. Yorn and his Trampoline partners — including Wallflowers keyboardist Rami Jaffe — have compiled 18



Poor of vision, Pete Yorn mistakes his guitar for a supermodel.

tracks that should hang the head of every A&R exec in the music business. It's the best hour of radio you'll never hear. Chris Stills is Rufus Wainwright without the whiny rehab vibes, and actress Minnie Driver, in a track from her forthcoming debut, adds an earthy edge to Sarah McLachlan's misty romanticism. And the Wallflowers lend extra clout, as Jakob Dylan leads a rock-legend-offspring tango with Julian Lennon's 1985 hit "Too Late for Goodbyes." Halos all around.

KAREN SCHOEMER

WHEAT

PER SECOND, PER SECOND, PER SECOND . . . EVERY SECOND ✪✪✪

AWARE/COLUMBIA

Massachusetts mopers cheer up on poppy fourth album

Once heavily in debt to Britain's gloomy shoegazing scene, Wheat adopt a new, far breezier musical style for their first release since 1999's *Hope and Adams*. The tone is set by "I Met a Girl," a cheery, hook-laden semi-rocker that nicely contrasts with the mischievous vocals of singer-guitarist Scott Levesque ("I met a girl I'd like to know better/But I'm already with someone"). Elsewhere, "Hey, So Long (Ohio)" calls to mind a less miserable Wilco, while the piano-spined "Closer to Mercury" may well be the cheeriest song about unrequited love ever recorded. Lush, string-laden production courtesy of Mercury Rev's Dave Fridmann helps salvage a clutch of tracks that sound as if they would have benefited from the band taking even longer between albums. The end product is an album that almost makes you hope they continue to have bad luck label-wise, if this is the result.

CLARK COLLIS

BLENDER APPROVED

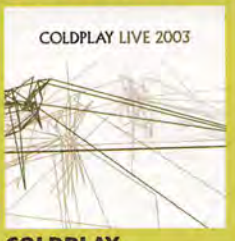
The best NEW RELEASES of the last three months

RYAN ADAMS

ROCK N ROLL

LOST HIGHWAY

Lonely, drugged and horny, the alt-country scamp trades his banjo for pulsating commercial rock full of Nirvana howls and U2 spaciousness.



COLDPLAY

LIVE 2003

CAPITOL

Confident and magisterial in this Australian concert, Coldplay make melancholia toweringly seductive as Chris Martin buckles with emotion.

AL GREEN

I CAN'T STOP

BLUE NOTE

The right reverend turns the clock back to 1976 for this secular comeback. Wondrously emotive, his voice is still a gift from God.

LUDACRIS

CHICKEN-N-BEER

DISTURBING THA PEACE/DEF JAM SOUTH

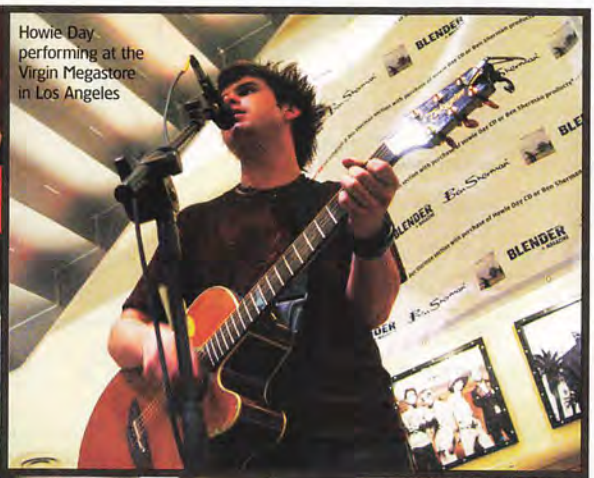
Even at his smuttiest (the stripper ode "P-Poppin' "), Atlanta's massive-fro'd jester balances skill, style and comedy on his third solo romp.

Jim Wright

BLENDER'S PROMOTIONAL SECTION

GUEST LIST

COMPETITIONS, EVENTS AND OTHER FUN STUFF WE THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT



Howie Day performing at the Virgin Megastore in Los Angeles

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stellastarr* performing at the Virgin Megastore in New York's Union Square

BEN SHERMAN UNPLUGGED!

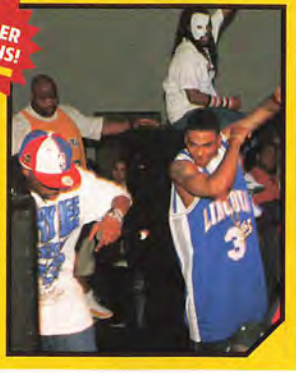
BLENDER MAGAZINE AND BEN SHERMAN teamed to bring NYC's biggest rock sensation, stellastarr*, to the Virgin Megastore in Union Square on October 23. The event celebrated the launch of Ben Sherman's limited-edition Beatles collection, a series of t-shirts and button downs sporting Fab Four designs. stellastarr* played to a packed crowd of indie-rock hipsters, who all sang along enthusiastically to the band's powerfully melodic tunes and walked away with autographs and gift bags. *Blender* and Ben Sherman hosted a similar event in Los Angeles a few days later featuring a passionate performance from singer-songwriter Howie Day. Available at Virgin Megastores & *www.benshermanusa.com*.

Ben Sherman®

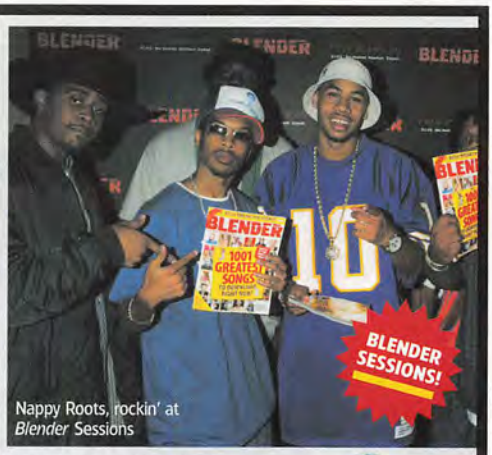
UNRAPPED

BLENDER SESSIONS!

★ ON SEPTEMBER 17, *Blender* and Fila premiered *Blender* Sessions in New York City. The Sessions, called "Unrapped," offered an urban feel and featured an intimate performance by both Nelly and his newest artist on Derrty Records, Murphy Lee. Fila and *Blender* transformed VUE into Fila-World, with dancers throwing out Fila merchandise to the more than 900 guests, including Paris and Nikki Hilton, 3LW and LaLa. *Blender* Sessions remained true to form by creating an intimate urban performance for everyone to celebrate.



FILA ★ Heineken Malibu Derrty Entertainment Coke adrenaline rush



Nappy Roots, rockin' at *Blender* Sessions

NAPPY ROOTS

★ ON OCTOBER 7, Blender Sessions headed back to Los Angeles's newest hotspot, Avalon. **Nappy Roots** promoted their new album *Wooden Leather* and brought down the house in front of more than 500 guests.

BLENDER AND NAMCO

★ YOU KNOW HOW sometimes you flip through a magazine, get to the video-game reviews and think, "They're wrong — that game was awesome" or "I could've written a better review"? Well, here's your chance, pal. That's right: *Blender* magazine and Namco are giving you the chance at the ultimate prize package. You can win:

- **The chance to review a Namco game and have your picture in a future Guest List**
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To find out how to win this amazing prize and get your gaming opinions in an upcoming issue, log on to *blender.com/contests/namco*.

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TORQUE

Torque, a high-speed action adventure from the producer of *The Fast and the Furious*, *XXX* and *S.W.A.T.*, stars **Martin Henderson, Ice Cube, Monet Mazur and Jay Hernandez.** Biker Cary Ford (Henderson) returns to his hometown to reunite with his girlfriend (Mazur). Once home, Ford is framed for a murder he didn't commit, targeted for revenge by the victim's brother (Cube) and pursued by the FBI as he tries to clear his name and outrace his enemies. **IN THEATERS JANUARY 16.**

For more information, visit *www.torquemovie.com*

WEEK ENDING SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7

THE 40 MOST POPULAR SONGS IN AMERICA

→ What sophomore jinx? Alicia Keys holds off a hungry *Ruuuuben* Studdard for this month's top spot

POSITION	TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1	"YOU DON'T KNOW MY NAME"	ALICIA KEYS	*THE DIARY OF ALICIA KEYS* J RECORDS
2	"FLYING WITHOUT WINGS"	RUBEN STUDDARD	*SOULFUL* J RECORDS
3	"HIT THAT"	THE OFFSPRING	*SPLINTER* COLUMBIA
4	"STUNT 101"	G-UNIT	*BEG FOR MERCY* SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE
5	"IT'S MY LIFE"	NO DOUBT	*THE SINGLES 1992–2003* INTERSCOPE
6	"FEELING THIS"	BLINK-182	*BLINK-182* GEFFEN
7	"ME AGAINST THE MUSIC"	BRITNEY SPEARS	*IN THE ZONE* JIVE
8	"OUT OF CONTROL"	HOOBASTANK	*THE REASON* ISLAND
9	"INVISIBLE"	CLAY AIKEN	*MEASURE OF A MAN* RCA
10	"AWAY FROM ME"	PUDDLE OF MUDD	*LIFE ON DISPLAY* FLAWLESS/GEFFEN
11	"IZ U"	NELLY	*DA DERRTY VERSIONS* FO' REEL/UNIVERSAL
12	"PASS THAT DUTCH"	MISSY ELLIOTT	*THIS IS NOT A TEST* GOLD MIND/ELEKTRA
13	"CHANGE CLOTHES"	JAY-Z	*THE BLACK ALBUM* ROC-A-FELLA/DEF JAM
14	"HEY YA!"	OUTKAST	*SPEAKERBOXXX/ THE LOVE BELOW* ARISTA
15	"RUNNIN' (DYING TO LIVE)"	2PAC FEAT. THE NOTORIOUS B.I.G.	*TUPAC: RESURRECTION ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK* AMARU/INTERSCOPE
16	"ME, MYSELF AND I"	BEYONCÉ FEAT. SEAN PAUL	*DANGEROUSLY IN LOVE* COLUMBIA
17	"RIGHT NOW"	KORN	*TAKE A LOOK IN THE MIRROR* EPIC
18	"GANGSTA NATION"	WESTSIDE CONNECTION	*TERRORIST THREATS* PRIORITY/CAPITOL
19	"POWERLESS (SAY WHAT YOU WANT)"	NELLY FURTADO	*FOLKLORE* DREAMWORKS
20	"HOLIDAE IN"	CHINGY FEAT. LUDACRIS AND SNOOP DOGG	*JACKPOT* DISTURBING THA PEACE/CAPITOL
21	"STILL FRAME"	TRAPT	*TRAPT* WARNER BROS.
22	"FALLEN"	SARAH McLACHLAN	*AFTERGLOW* ARISTA
23	"MILKSHAKE"	KELIS	*TASTY* STAR TRAK/ARISTA
24	"NUMB"	LINKIN PARK	*METEORA* WARNER BROS.
25	"YOU AND I BOTH"	JASON MRAZ	*WAITING FOR MY ROCKET TO COME* ELEKTRA
26	"WHITE FLAG"	DIDO	*LIFE FOR RENT* ARISTA
27	"BEHIND BLUE EYES"	LIMPBIZKIT	*RESULTS MAY VARY* FLIP/INTERSCOPE
28	"FELL IN LOVE WITH A BOY"	JOSS STONE	*THE SOUL SESSIONS* S-CURVE
29	"HOT & WET"	112 FEAT. LUDACRIS	*HOT & WET* DEF SOUL
30	"BREATHE"	MICHELLE BRANCH	*HOTEL PAPER* MAVERICK/WARNER BROS.
31	"BRIGHT LIGHTS"	MATCHBOX TWENTY	*MORE THAN YOU THINK YOU ARE* ATLANTIC
32	"MORE & MORE"	JOE	*AND THEN . . .* JIVE
33	"STAND UP"	LUDACRIS FEAT. SHAWNNA	*CHICKEN N BEER* DISTURBING THA PEACE/DEF JAM SOUTH
34	"I AM THE HIGHWAY"	AUDIOSLAVE	*AUDIOSLAVE* EPIC/INTERSCOPE
35	"RE-ALIGN"	GODSMACK	*FACELESS* REPUBLIC/UNIVERSAL
36	"READ MY MIND"	AVANT	*PRIVATE ROOM* GEFFEN
37	"SOMEDAY"	NICKELBACK	*THE LONG ROAD* ROADRUNNER
38	"THE TROUBLE WITH LOVE IS"	KELLY CLARKSON	*THANKFUL* RCA
39	"MY IMMORTAL"	EVANESCENCE	*FALLEN* WIND-UP
40	"GIGOLO"	NICK CANNON	*NICK CANNON* JIVE

1 ALICIA KEYS
"YOU DON'T KNOW MY NAME"
THE DIARY OF ALICIA KEYS

Alicia Keys curls some vintage Philly soul around her fingers and coos the story of a love-struck waitress on the first single from her follow-up to 2001's Grammy-racking *Songs in A Minor*. She has performed live on *Good Morning America* and recently starred on NBC's *American Dreams*, and next month she'll pack her bags and her piano for a major world tour.

3 THE OFFSPRING
"HIT THAT"
SPLINTER

The lead single from their seventh album was the most added at alternative-rock stations its first week. Pretty fly, guys! The 32 million–selling pop-punk mainstays wrapped up a headlining tour in Denver this month; in January, they kick off a European trip and perform at the 2004 X Games in Aspen, Colorado.

6 BLINK-182
"FEELING THIS"
BLINK-182

Schoolkids writhe in a hormonal frenzy in the video for this song, which premiered on MTV's *Making the Video*. Last month, the trio visited Jimmy Kimmel and performed — fully clothed — on *TRL*. Next month, the San Diego pop-punkers continue their Dolla Bill Tour with Bubba Sparxxx and Kinison, signed to drummer Travis Barker's La Salle label.

8 HOOBASTANK
"OUT OF CONTROL"
THE REASON

A name so bad it's, well, just plain bad didn't stop these emo-metallers from posting platinum sales of their 2001 self-titled debut. They're fresh off the road with Oklahoma's All-American Rejects and Andrew W.K., and in January, they'll get their scream on with P.O.D. and Linkin Park.

13 JAY-Z
"CHANGE CLOTHES"
THE BLACK ALBUM

Hip-hop's biggest baller swears he'll raise his jersey to the rafters after this, his eighth album. This song teams him up with longtime collaborators the Neptunes, and its video boasts cameos from Naomi Campbell and Mary J. Blige. Last month, Jay-Z played a sold-out Madison Square Garden show and will release an autobiography, *The Black Book*, early next year.

HOW WE DID IT

The Most Popular Songs chart is based on radio and video airplay and album sales. Provided by HITSDailyDouble.com: "Proof that any idiot in the music business can have a Web site."

Courtesy of J Records (Keys), F. Scott Schafer (The Offspring), Estavan Oriol (Blink-182), Danny Clinch (Hoobastank), Jonathan Mannion (Jay-Z)

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Before the Fall

Smashing hits from the days when Jacko wasn't wacko

A FEW ENTERTAINERS have succeeded as spectacularly and fallen so profoundly as the middle-aged pop singer Michael Jackson. It has been almost a decade since he officially moved from superstar to train wreck, though that process actually began with the mammoth, record-shattering sales of 1983's *Thriller*, after which he had no place to go but down. Unlike Elvis Presley, who died, and the Beatles, who broke up, Jackson has remained in the public eye — enduring charges of child abuse, skin peels and arrested development — a slave to an unquenchable thirst for our collective applause.

It's a shame Jackson can't stay out of his own way (or our eyesight): His oddball persona has almost completely obscured his artistry. The voice of this Gary, Indiana, native is easily one of the most distinctive and imitated sounds in recorded music history, having influenced Justin Timberlake, B2K and countless other pop-star wannabes. These 18 songs are primarily the number 1 singles he has recorded since his first adult solo album, *Off the Wall*, which was released on Epic in 1979 — which means his wonderful kiddie Jackson 5 hits ("ABC," "The Love You Save") and teenage recordings with the Jacksons ("Shake Your Body") aren't included.

MICHAEL JACKSON
NUMBER ONES
★★★★
EPIC

TRACK LISTING

Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough
Rock With You
Billie Jean
Beat It
Thriller
I Just Can't Stop Loving You
Bad
Smooth Criminal
The Way You Make Me Feel
Man in the Mirror
Dirty Diana
Black or White
You Are Not Alone
Earth Song
You Rock My World
Break of Dawn
One More Chance
Ben (live)

His voice is one of the most imitated sounds in music history. ★

While this set isn't comprehensive, it does testify to the myriad vocal abilities of the mature MJ. Whether exuberant ("Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough," "The Way You Make Me Feel"), earnest ("Man in the Mirror," "Black or White"), aggressive ("Beat It," "Bad"), paranoid ("Billie Jean," "Smooth Criminal") or sexy ("Rock With You," "You Rock My World"), Jackson whoops, hiccups, groans, moans and croons, funneling both soul and gospel through his idiosyncratic delivery.

Like all great pop singers, Jackson has a signature sound yet adapts easily to different musical contexts, whether disco, rock or sing-along pop. Which is why the versatile arranger/muse Quincy Jones, who produced the bulk of these hits, suited Jackson so well: Having worked with everyone from Frank Sinatra to Leslie Gore to Count Basie, Jones surrounded Jackson's voice with fine musicians and sharp melodies.

Admittedly, Jackson sometimes employs these tools to sing theatrical crap like the campy horror show "Thriller" or the faux-rock of "Dirty Diana." Listening to this collection, it's clear how much acting goes into Jackson's singing; his specialty is high-strung, Sal Mineo–like characters whom he plays with passion, no matter how badly the part is written. On up-tempo tracks, this can lead him to histrionics that often tip into self-parody.

Mid-tempo songs and ballads focus his emotionalism and play into the romantic innocence essential to his persona. For example, on both R. Kelly contributions, the comforting "You Are Not Alone" (from the 1995 look back *HIStory: Past, Present and Future, Book 1*) and the new single, "One More Chance" (which attempts to sound like an *Off the Wall* outtake), Jackson gives stripped-down, well-modulated performances that are skillfully produced by Kelly — who, for all his notoriety, is one of pop music's modern masters.

The only real clunker, and it's a doozy, is a live version of "Ben," a ballad Jackson recorded as a child as the theme for a ridiculous thriller about a murderous rat. This is a song no one older than 12 should ever sing — or be forced to listen to — again. The attempt to recycle that performance illustrates the goofy bad taste that has played a part in derailing his career.

It's too much to ask that *Number Ones* somehow remind the world just how talented Michael Jackson was and still is. Between his ongoing weirdness and nasty speculation about his sexuality, that's too big a burden to be overcome by mere songs, no matter how good they are.

But as a musical document, it's hard to do better than hearing him sing hits with his elevating combination of flair, rhythmic daring, generous melodicism and public vulnerability. With Presley and the Beatles, it took years after they disappeared to separate myths from music, and eventually, the same will happen for Jackson. When it does, this record will form a large part of his legacy. *NELSON GEORGE*

Real noses are so '80s.

Lynn Goldsmith/Corbis (2)

Actually, no,
we don't want
to sleep over.

DAVID BOWIE

SOUND + VISION ✪✪✪✪

VIRGIN

Four-decade career chronicle of England's greatest living actor

There's no argument that the tracks on David Bowie's *Sound + Vision* box set — originally released in 1989, now re-issued with an additional 20 tracks recorded from 1980 to 1993 — are of almost uniformly high quality. One could spend a very pleasant pot-smoking 19 or so minutes listening to the live versions of the art-rock gems "Station to Station," "Warszawa" and "Breaking Glass" that open the third CD. A new fourth disc, salvaging the best of *Tin Machine, Tin Machine II, Black Tie White Noise* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*, is replete with pure and probably unfamiliar pleasures. The question is, for whom is this compilation necessary? But for the numerous worthwhile live tracks and rarities — an unnervingly unfamiliar arrangement of "Rebel Rebel," a superb live B-side of "Modern Love" — *Sound + Vision* is a solid sampler of Bowie's prowess as a performer and as a man who's never met an arrangement too experimental to try.

MIM UDOVITCH

THE SCORE »

✪✪✪✪✪
EXCELLENT. A MUST-HAVE

✪✪✪✪
GREAT. CHECK IT OUT

✪✪✪
GOOD IN ITS GENRE

✪✪
JUST OK

✪
WEAK

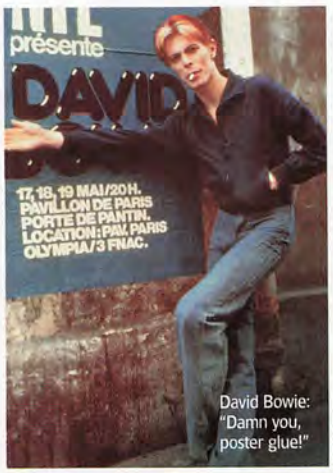
COUNTING CROWS

FILMS ABOUT GHOSTS: THE BEST OF . . . ✪✪

GEFFEN

Career-spanning set from eternally pained, 18 million–selling bohos

You're at your corner bar, a long workday behind you, watching the game. All of a sudden, some doughy, dreadlocked white guy sidles up and begins a querulous ramble about loneliness — only he's mentioning gray guitars and



David Bowie: "Damn you, poster glue!"

Picasso, calling you "Mr. Jones" and confessing, "I felt so symbolic yesterday." As Adam Duritz made clear on his band's 1993 breakout single/barroom diary, he's one heavy-handed drunk. Sober, his lyrics aren't helped by his precious whine ("Sea of pens and feathers/And all other instruments of faith and sex and God in the belly of a black-winged bird," from "Rain King," is typically overwhelming). His California six-piece were grunge-era anomalies, trafficking in sweeping country-rock wistfulness. The new "She Don't Want Nobody Near" finds Duritz painting the same kind of hammy portrait of detachment he's labored over for a decade.

JONAH WEINER

PETER GABRIEL

HIT ✪✪✪✪

GEFFEN

Formerly fey prog veteran discovers sex and politics

Back in the '70s, fronting the wacky yet frightfully serious progsters Genesis, Peter Gabriel wore flowers on his head and dressed up as a fox. So this sumptuous two-CD, 150-minute solo retrospective represents a mighty recovery. Although his only real smash singles date from 1986 — the thunder-funking number 1 "Sledgehammer" and the brassy "Big Time" — *Hit* captures Gabriel's magnetic combination of grave political intensity ("Biko") and raw humping ("Steam"), while also tracking his restless development from sweet, ultra-English folkie tunes such as "Solsbury Hill" (1977) to the crunching techno drums, muezzin wails and discordant strings of "Signal to Noise," from 2002. Even as a casual inquiry, this is a panoramic array of imaginative songs and sounds.

PHIL SUTCLIFFE

FAMOUS AMOS

Redheaded Steinway prodigy offers the best of her complex CDs

TORI AMOS

TALES OF A LIBRARIAN ✪✪✪✪

ATLANTIC

» FROM FARM-MOORED art-rockers to Barry Manilow's Kmart Chopin, scores of performers have tried to make classical piano music truly pop. But only North Carolina–born Tori Amos has done it consistently well. With lightning speed and lake-water tone, the English émigré sings soprano lines as Kate Bush did in the '80s. Yet fragility is not Amos's default demeanor.

She takes fierce positions, yet she never forgets the killer arpeggio or riff. She can be outrageous. But writhing around on her piano stool, she's also commenting on the viability of an instrument that, in rock terms, mostly reads "Not Guitar." Amos is musical and lawyerly, racy and warm, literary and daft. She is, in the form of a piano whiz–turned–singer-songwriter, the women from *Sex and the City* — all four of them. Where other female performers extend the legacies of Chrissie Hynde or Stevie Nicks or Madonna, Amos creates her own.

Ten years after she debuted talking of religion and sex and fairies, her emotion-driven fusions of romantic-era structure and sound linked to the form, spirit and expansiveness of '70s-sired rock remain peerless.

As an anthology of Amos's most tuneful material, this set cannot satisfy as do her best albums — 1992's *Little Earthquakes* and its searing follow-up, *Under the Pink*, and the 1998 rock extravaganza *From the Choirgirl Hotel*. From her first few years, you get beauty as uncut as "Winter," neo-R&B as polished as "God," eccentricity as catchy as "Professional Widow." With "Cornflake Girl," you get kitchen-sink memories expressed in waltzing, surreal terms; after Amos adds fuller, rock-geared arrangements, you get "Jackie's Strength," with the ecstatic invocation of Jacqueline Onassis as a woman who could have wilted or flourished but did the latter.

You also get, in "Snow Cherries From France," one of two previously unreleased songs, leisurely folk-rock imbued with sharp, fleet turns. What you don't get are the surroundings. And with Amos, the long form is no less expendable than it is with Led Zeppelin. *JAMES HUNTER*

Amos is racy and warm, literary and daft.

THE HOLLIES

THE LONG ROAD HOME ✪✪✪

CAPITOL

Lavishly packaged six-CD set celebrates the fortieth anniversary of Britpop granddaddies

For 11 years starting in 1963, the Hollies were an awesome hit machine whose singles included "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother" and "The Air That I Breathe," echoing the lighter side of their contemporaries the Beatles. Yet despite their talent — for sunny power-pop, at first, then for more dramatic ballads — the group was also strangely anonymous, especially after singer Graham Nash (beguiled by 1967's Summer of Love) left to cofound Crosby, Stills & Nash, relocating the group's trademark harmonies from rainy England to sun-kissed California. Though the Hollies are lately championed by Guided by Voices and other neo-psychedelic bands, these six CDs suggest they were mainly skillful imitators of bolder spirits — they'd hop from Dylan covers to teenybop as the market demanded. The compilers' decision to omit most of the hit singles (they prefer to call this "an alternative history") is certainly brave, but it won't give the Hollies their deserved place in the mainstream of pop history.

PAUL DU NOYER

Peter Gabriel: Dude, it can't be *that* big.

ELTON JOHN

GOODBYE YELLOW BRICK ROAD: DELUXE EDITION ✪✪✪✪

ISLAND

Piano-pop king in his pre-hair-weave glory

In his *Lion King* phase, Elton John has worn Versace and chuckled about throwing bottles of Plax at his partner mid-fight. That's fine, but during the '70s, when he dominated the pop charts, John — collaborating with fiery musicians, string arrangers and producers, plus Bernie Taupin, a one-of-a-kind lyricist who helped John smoke up a marijuana-nurtured London-Nashville of the mind — sang and composed albums of spectacular vigor and fluidity. This 1973 double is one of them; it featured no just-OK tracks, like the four previously unreleased ones this reissue includes. Forget the unforgettable hits — "Bennie and the Jets," the title aria, even "Candle in the Wind." The album commingles sweet cinematic sweep ("The Ballad of Danny Bailey") and noble Stones/Aerosmith-style raunch ("Dirty Little Girl," "All the Young Girls Love Alice"). And that's just one stretch.

JAMES HUNTER

AIMEE MANN

LOST IN SPACE ✪✪✪✪

SUPEREGO

Fourth solo album from frosty princess of romantic regret

Only a year after it was released, this underheard gem has been expanded with 10 bonus tracks (including a live version of Coldplay's "The Scientist") — all the better to again showcase singer-songwriter Mann's consistently whip-smart, whip-sexy music. Nearly two decades past her debut with the New Wave group 'Til Tuesday (known for "Voices Carry," from 1985), Mann exudes the same icy, come-hither-get-lost vibes. "I've got love and anger, they come as a pair/You can take your chances, but buyer beware," she warns in "Real Bad News," while the title cut finds her confessing that she's "close enough for just pretending to care." Mann contrasts the dark, emotional disconnects of her lyrics with ever-lilting melodies and vivid, late-era-Beatles arrangements. Clever is as clever does.

BILLY ALTMAN

KYLIE MINOGUE

GREATEST HITS 87–97 ✪✪✪

PWL/JIVE/BMG

***Blender*'s favorite lust object takes a look behind her**

The news that 35-year-old Kylie Minogue has vowed to stop flaunting her small but perfect derrière in videos and magazines is a blow for mankind and, one suspects, for her accountants, too. Never has a pop artist's music been so incidental. Of

I LOVE THIS CD!

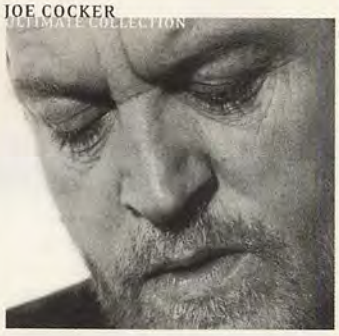
BRIAN GRAZER
PRODUCER OF *8 MILE* AND *THE ALAMO*

2PAC
GREATEST HITS
DEATH ROW

"He's amazing. You just have to listen; you don't have to be a hip-hop guy. It's melodic. His music is so good."

Opposite page, from top: Andrew Kent/Retna Ltd.; Chris Buck/Corbis Outline. This page, from top: Armando Gallo/Retna Ltd.; Steve Granitz/Wireimage.com

JOE COCKER
ULTIMATE COLLECTION



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the 26 tracks here (plus an additional eight remixes on the second CD — you're spoiling us!), almost none are of any use at all. The Stock/Aitken/Waterman bargain-basement production jobs of the late '80s are gruesomely catchy. "Shocked" and "What Do I Have to Do?", from her, sigh, "SexKylie" period, conjure images of her hi-NRG, fishnet stocking–clad bottom wriggling without mercy. But a decade of rickety U.K. hits is all we get. There's no Manic Street Preachers collaboration, no boffo "Can't Get You Out of My Head" and now, no ass, either. That sound you hear is grown men weeping.

ANDY PEMBERTON

Kylie Minogue: "Must've been something else that set off the metal detector, miss."

AUGUSTUS PABLO

KING TUBBYS MEETS ROCKERS UPTOWN ✪✪✪✪

SHANACHIE

The model for most of the dub that has come after it

The late Augustus Pablo was a prolific Jamaican producer (and melodica player) in the mid-'70s, specializing in what he called the "Far East Sound": minor keys and slinky tempos. *King Tubbys* turns a bunch of his productions inside out so they radiate echo and low end, warping the air around them, especially on the astounding title track, which seems to be very slow and very fast at the same time. The album's title is not a reference to fellow producer King Tubby, who mixed this album, but to his sound system's "King Tubbys" — like Pablo's "Rockers," a huge, booming set of speakers. Which means that this freshly reissued, slightly expanded 1976 cornerstone of dub reggae is meant to be played at volumes so high that it sounds like a parallel bass-and-drum world brushing against our own.

DOUGLAS WOLK

BONNIE RAITT

THE BEST OF BONNIE RAITT ✪✪✪✪

CAPITOL

Blues-rock ace solves her career problems by winning Grammys, writing grownup songs

Perhaps more accurately titled *The Best of the Capitol Years*, this set excludes everything from Bonnie Raitt's early-'70s stay at Warner Bros., where she arrived at age 22 with a chip on her shoulder (redheaded Quaker girls can't wail the blues and play slashing slide guitar, you say?) and set out making homages to blues matriarch Sippie Wallace. What this does have is all the hits, including the oddly undersung ballads that, starting in 1989, made her the darling of yuppies who didn't mind a bit of grit. Far better are the sublime, hilarious, infinitely salacious "Gnawin' on It," on which she sounds like a woman possessed, and her comparably glorious take on Zimbabwean gospel, "Hear Me Lord," on which she makes clear that the Lord had better think twice about denying that for which she appeals.

JOHN MENDELS(S)OHN

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS

GREATEST HITS ✪✪✪✪

WARNER BROS.

Late-period Chili Peppers: Out with the tube socks, in with the songs

For their first decade, the Red Hot Chili Peppers' records pretty much sucked, with lame jokes and aimless punk-funk jams instead of songs. But *Greatest Hits* focuses on the Chilis, Decade 2, a '90s-and-beyond run in which craft trumped sock-encased stage antics as the quartet's forte. Their underrated 1995 album, *One Hot Minute*, is underrepresented in favor of a handful of

I LOVE THIS CD!

LUCY LIU
ACTRESS IN *KILL BILL VOLS. 1 AND 2*

BJÖRK
GREATEST HITS
ELEKTRA

"She uses rhythms in a unique way. She's a breakthrough artist. A lot of people don't understand her music."

BLACK SHROUD

Final recordings from the late country giant

JOHNNY CASH

UNEARTHED ✪✪✪✪

AMERICAN/LOST HIGHWAY

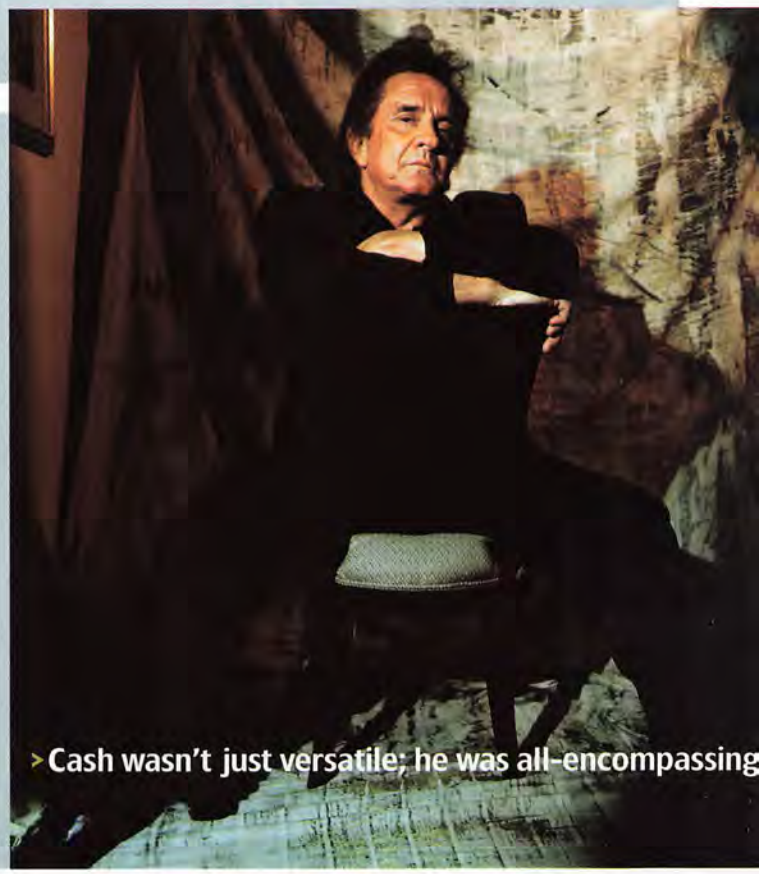
IN THE LAST decade of Johnny Cash's life, the gnarly Arkansas growler came up with some of the funkiest goods of his career. Between meeting producer Rick Rubin in 1993 and dying in September at age 71, the variable country legend reinvented himself as someone who could unite the rootsiest of traditional styles with the most adventurous modern songwriting. You want proof? It's all here, on these five CDs.

At first, Rubin and Cash looked like a gimmick. One was a young New Yorker whose clients included Run-DMC, Slayer and the Beastie Boys, while the other — well, the other was Johnny Cash. But the two sparked off each other with spectacular results.

When failing health forced Cash to abandon his 300-gigs-a-year habit, he redirected his restlessness into recording. The four albums he made for Rubin were only a fraction of the work they did together; for their first collaboration, 1994's *American Recordings*, Cash taped around 100 songs.

Unearthed completes the story, with a "best of" the Rubin years plus numerous unreleased tracks and a CD of spiritual songs. Under Rubin's influence, Cash furthered an appetite for non-Nashville collaborations, which had already paired him with Bob Dylan and U2 — this set includes duets with a rusty, overmatched Joe Strummer (on Bob Marley's "Redemption Song") and Fiona Apple (on Cat Stevens's "Father and Son") as well as Nick Cave and Tom Petty. With anyone else, it might have been a cross-demographic marketing scam. But the Man in Black's subterranean rumble and grave dignity sound incapable of guile: He wasn't just "versatile"; he was all-encompassing.

Bruce Springsteen once said that Cash combined "the social consciousness of folk music, the gravity and humor of country music and the rebellion of rock & roll." On these sparsely arranged CDs, he sings music ranging from Trent Reznor to Baptist hymns and takes ownership of it all, because he had a breadth of experience and depth of understanding that were uncommon in music. By anyone else's standards, Cash's leftovers equal a feast. *PAUL DU NOYER*



Cash wasn't just versatile; he was all-encompassing

ringers: a cover of Stevie Wonder's "Higher Ground" from '89, a soundtrack stray, a pair of new trifles that primarily serve as showcases for guitarist John Frusciante's intricate Hendrixisms. Otherwise, RHCP have been on a roll ever since Anthony Kiedis broke out his previously hidden persona as a credible balladeer on "Under the Bridge." The Chili Peppers as the great alt-rock singles band — who knew?

GREG KOT

RYUICHI SAKAMOTO

MOTOTRONIC: THE BEST OF SAKAMOTO ✪✪✪

SONY CLASSICAL

Japanese soundtrack man's finest moments collected

MOODY MOVIE MUSIC

Japanese rock and pop frequently seem so bizarre that they rarely gain an audience outside their homeland — there have been few takers over the years for such oddball Japanese genres as group sounds or Lolita-pop. Ryuichi Sakamoto is the exception: a former member of the Yellow Magic Orchestra, Japan's answer to Kraftwerk, with a 20-year career scoring film soundtracks. "Forbidden Colours," the theme from the 1983 film *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* (starring David Bowie), is justly his best-known work — its combination of Far Eastern piano motifs, subtle strings and the voice of British New Romantic singer David Sylvian is spine-tingling and has aged well. The rest — piano instrumentals, jazz pastiches, the occasional diversion into techno-funk such as "Neo Geo" — sounds a little aimless without the accompanying visuals, but it tinkles along prettily enough.

JAMES SLAUGHTER

Red Hot Chili Peppers: Very mature, Flea!

BOB SEGER AND THE SILVER BULLET BAND

GREATEST HITS 2 ✪✪

CAPITOL

Second hits collection from Detroit band playing on five or six Midwestern radio stations at this very moment

Bob Seger sings like a man with a beard. And a pickup truck. That's loaded with cases of Coors. For 35 years, the Detroit-bred bandleader has helped define a certain brand of American musical populism: self-consciously working-class, arena-rock boogie-woogie that dominated FM radio in the '70s and '80s and then disappeared, only to be resuscitated by Garth Brooks and his large-hatted peers in the '90s. Throughout his hitmaking peak, Seger was dogged by the "poor man's Bruce Springsteen" pejorative, and while that kind of comparison is generally unfair, it's also true: Outside of a rich handful of myth-making gems ("Night Moves," "Like a Rock" and "We've Got Tonight," all found on his enduring 1994 first hits collection, now at 6 million sold), Seger's penchant for cornball lyrics and musical conservatism trump his pleasantly husky voice and general good-heartedness ("The Fire Down Below" admirably sticks up for hookers). Two new songs, his first since 1996, unfortunately go to show that rock and roll does indeed occasionally forget.

CRAIG MARKS

SLAYER

SOUNDTRACK TO THE APOCALYPSE ✪✪✪

AMERICAN

The four horsemen of black metal bring the noise with a raw, career-spanning retrospective

When Slayer debuted in 1984, they were Metallica 2.0, a harder, faster, Satanic thrash alternative. But as Metallica moved toward mass appeal, Slayer threw their (Salem's) lot in with black-mass-worshipping headbangers. With questionable politics, jagged, ballad-free cacophony and a catalog that reads like Saddam Hussein's résumé ("Criminally Insane," "Chemical Warfare"), they spawned a hive of extremists, from Pantera to Meshuggah. This four-disc-plus-DVD collection targets the faithful: Who else wants sludgy, unreleased live tracks and home demos oozing tape hiss? It also cements Slayer's slot in the heavy hall of fame, spotlighting dense, often surprising musicality (it's not for nothing that Public Enemy sampled "Angel of Death") and humor (a disembowelment of Iron Butterfly's psychedelic classic "In-a-Gadda-Da-Vida"). Slayer's devotion to brutality reveals integrity — a teeth-gnashing, monotonous integrity, but integrity nonetheless.

MATT DIEHL

BURIED TREASURE

UNEARTHING LOST CLASSICS >>

MC LYTE

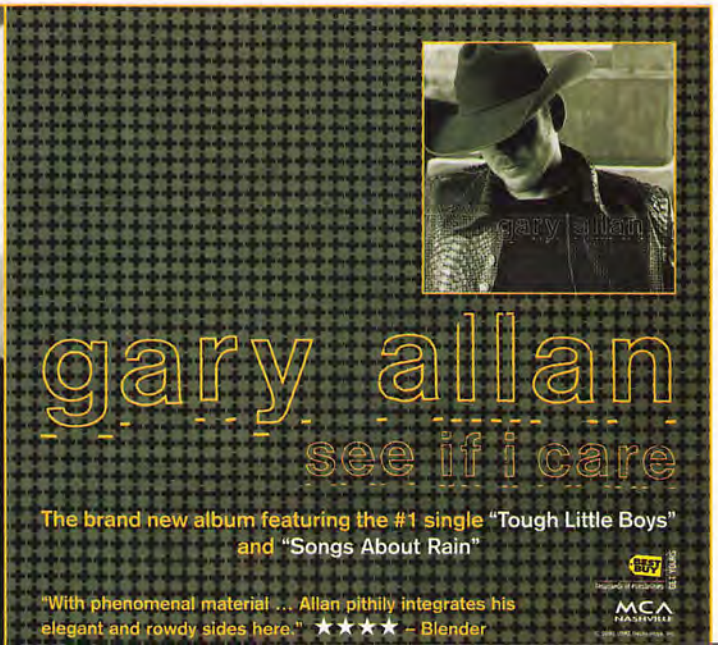
EYES ON THIS ✪✪✪✪

FIRST PRIORITY/ATLANTIC, 1989

MC Lyte's favorite shadow puppet was a coyote.

Her chalky snap is best known from her hip-hop hits ("Cold Rock a Party"), but MC Lyte once had a rep as one of the planet's hardest rappers — her evisceration of rival Antoinette is bluntly titled "Shut the Eff Up! (Hoe)." She shows off her storytelling on her second album, too, assisted by raw, swinging beats from the all-star likes of Marley Marl, Pee MD, Grand Puba and her brothers Audio Two. Lyte remains an MC's MC — check out "Slave 2 the Rhythm" to hear where the hook of Missy Elliott's "Funky Fresh Dressed" comes from.

DOUGLAS WOLK


gary allan
see if i care
The brand new album featuring the #1 single "Tough Little Boys" and "Songs About Rain"
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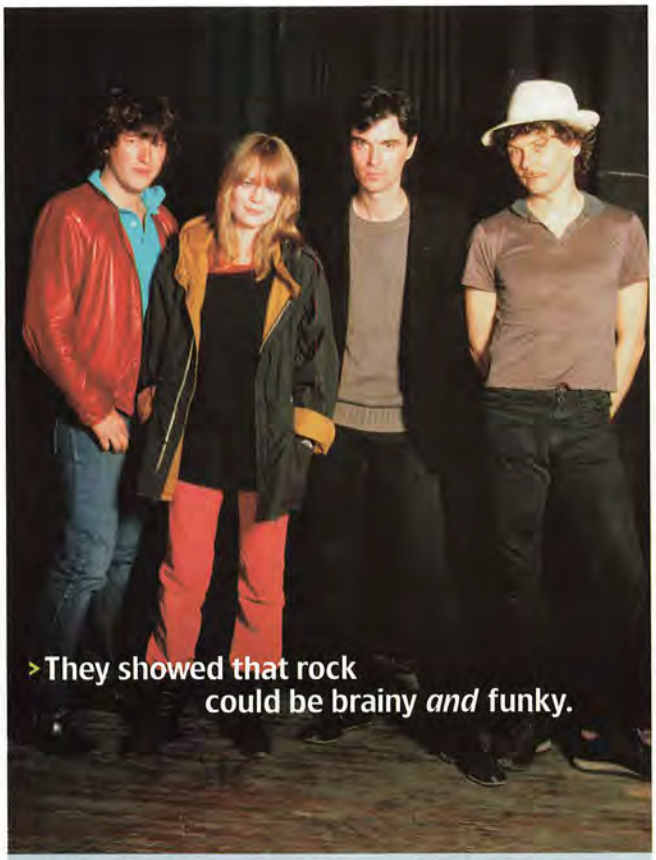
MCA NASHVILLE

Opposite page, from top: Graham Kuhn for Winstonwest.com; James Devaney/Wireimage.com; Tim Bauer/Headpress/Retna Ltd.
This page: Len Irish/Corbis Outline (Red Hot Chili Peppers); Alphonse Telymonde (still-life); Janette Beckman/Retna Ltd. (MC Lyte)



› They showed that rock could be brainy *and* funky.

PREPPY PUNKS

Bug-eyed alienation from America's greatest art-rock band

TALKING HEADS

ONCE IN A LIFETIME ✪✪✪✪✪

RHINO/SIRE

HOW CAN A Lacoste polo shirt be punk? In the founding days of CBGB, when other New York bands looked like a biker gang (the Ramones) or escaped mental patients (Television), Talking Heads resembled the JV tennis team.

Hatched at the Rhode Island School of Design, where they were known as the Artistics — or, alternately, the Autistics, due to their unreliable skills — they mixed an art-school love of concept and daring with clangy, nervous guitar tempests, a rhythm section that loved black music and singer David Byrne's insight that rock could be both brainy *and* funky. The music, Anthony Kiedis of the highly indebted Red Hot Chili Peppers later said, made him want to have sex with librarians.

Though all four Talking Heads were thin, preppy and unsuspecting, only the Sex Pistols wrote songs as alienated as "No Compassion" (from their 1977 debut) and "I'm Not in Love," which methodically disdain emotion as annoying and weak. David Byrne was rock's first Klingon.

Narrated from an airplane seat as he surveys happy people below him, "The Big Country" is a disgusted rejection of humanity; yelped in the voice of an alarmed office worker, his early songs reserve affection only for books, television and buildings. As kicked along by Chris Frantz's purposeful drumming, though, the music emulated dance rhythms with a lovingness that saved it from nihilism.

As Talking Heads got artier, experimenting with complex textures, they also — and this was crucial — got funkier, adding actual black musicians to the lineup. The magnificent *Remain in Light* (1980) celebrates the limitless variations of percussion and rhythm, and soon after, a soothed Byrne sang about devotion (the lovely "This Must Be the Place") and babies ("Stay Up Late").

The band tailed off, chasing solo recognition until an unpleasant 1988 breakup. But this three-CD, one-DVD box — marred only by incredibly pompous liner notes and a lack of worthy rarities — traces the evolution of American art-rock's greatest misfit, who began by predicting "One day we'll live in a world without love" and ended up singing wondrous songs about domesticity. *ROB TANNENBAUM*

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

THE ESSENTIAL BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN ✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA

Vivid hits and bonus "rarities" from Living Rock Savior

THE BEST OF THE BOSS

Pity Bruce Springsteen completists. In the pursuit of rarities, they own "Born to Run" on several CDs — the original album, the live box and, in the last decade alone, the first greatest hits, the *Tracks* rarities box and now this three-disc set. The real lesson here is not the doodlings but the sound quality: Until now, all of the repacks have used the initial CD transfers, which relegate Springsteen's music to disappointingly flat mid-fi monochrome. The remastered hits here offer a hint of what a long-overdue Dylan-style catalog upgrade might do for something majestic like *The River* — where the originals are waist-deep in big muddy, these transfers are expansive and crisp, riveting in their detail. As for the rarities, some are worthy — the concert staple "Trapped" sung as a desperate shout; a twitchy song called "From Small Things (Big Things Someday Come)," long ago covered by Dave Edmunds — and some, like the wandering Nashville evocation "County Fair," are so minor they have no business being on anything called "essential." *TOM MOON*

KEITH SWEAT

THE BEST OF KEITH SWEAT: MAKE YOU SWEAT ✪✪✪

RHINO/ELEKTRA

Gems from the king of digital R&B

Responsible for 1988's "I Want Her," one of the seminal songs of the New Jack Swing era — when emerging-star producers matched up-tempo, squelchy synths with exasperated vocal gasps — Keith Sweat hasn't let musical progress interfere with his vision of mechanical seduction. This hits set shows Sweat at his salacious best: two outstanding versions of the dreamlike "Make It Last Forever"; the New Jack ballad "Merry-Go-Round," replete with shimmering overdubs; "Something Just Ain't Right," which sounds like a Casio playing demolition derby. For 1996's "Twisted" and 1997's "My Body," Sweat tamed himself vocally but not conceptually. R. Kelly soon replaced him in the public consciousness, but for a spell, there was no computer lovin' like his. *JON CARAMANICA*

BLENDER APPROVED

The best REISSUES of the last three months

SHERYL CROW

THE VERY BEST OF SHERYL CROW

A&M

The Clinton era's Linda Ronstadt turns out to be rock & roll's most consistent singles artist over the past 10 years. Who knew?

ERIC B. AND RAKIM

PAID IN FULL: THE PLATINUM EDITION

ISLAND

The DJ who introduced James Brown to hip-hop teams up with the first virtuosic MC on this 1987 debut.

NO DOUBT

THE SINGLES 1992–2003

INTERSCOPE

Four colorful Californians offset garage-rock with New Wave glamour. Includes the bouncy "Just a Girl" and churning "Hella Good."

BETH ORTON

PASS IN TIME

BMG

For a supposed folkie, this Brit chanteuse's catalog is surprisingly diverse, moving from acoustic warbling to hammering electronica.

Marcia Resnick/Retna Ltd. (Talking Heads)

REISSUES IN BRIEF BY JON YOUNG >>

Kid Creole: "And you're *sure* you're bodyguards? . . ."

MARY CHAPIN CARPENTER

THE ESSENTIAL MARY CHAPIN CARPENTER ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Part of the progressive-country crowd that includes Lyle Lovett and Rosanne Cash, Carpenter specializes in literate story-songs — too literate, in fact. Her insightful, politely delivered tales of workaday desperation and simmering desire cry out for the beery, tear-stained vulgarity of old Nashville. "Shut Up and Kiss Me" may be the mildest come-on in recorded history.

ROBERT CRAY

PHONE BOOTH ✪✪✪

HIGHTONE

Cray has never been wholly comfortable as traditional guitar-hero bluesman — for every stinging solo, there's an introspective vocal from the deep-soul playbook. This collection of melancholy mid-'80s, pre-stardom tunes such as "Bad Influence" and "Playin' in the Dirt" transcends cliché through understatement, lending documentary realism to snapshots of lust and remorse.

TOM JONES

RELOADED GREATEST HITS ✪✪✪

DECCA/UTV

The Welsh alternative to Elvis Presley, Jones is at his roaring best on the tight-pants, hairy-chested '60s hits "Thunderball," "It's Not Unusual" and "What's New Pussycat?" Recent half-baked collaborations with Wyclef Jean, Portishead and Stereophonics miss the point, however, tempering his cheesy cartoon swagger in the pursuit of relevance.

KID CREOLE & THE COCONUTS

OFF THE COAST OF ME ✪✪✪✪✪

RAINMAN

Piloted by suave jester August Darnell, Kid Creole embodied the multicultural optimism of pre-AIDS, club-crazy New York high life. The Coconuts' nearly flawless 1980 debut is a fizzy cocktail of disco, funk and Latin textures graced by old-time Broadway pizzazz and tart wit, from the wicked impotence lament "Mr. Softee" to the Studio 54 saga "Darrio." You can be sure Madonna took notice.

JOE SATRIANI

THE ELECTRIC JOE SATRIANI: AN ANTHOLOGY ✪

EPIC/LEGACY

Other guitar studs may riff faster than the Long Island–bred Satriani, but it's doubtful any play with less feeling. While his "shred first, ask questions later" philosophy seems harmless enough on 1987's career-igniting "Surfing With the Alien," two shrieking discs of fancy fretwork for its own dimwitted sake have the effect of a Novocaine overdose.

ALLEN TOUSSAINT

THE COMPLETE WARNER BROS. RECORDINGS ✪✪✪

RHINO HANDMADE

The Shakespeare of New Orleans R&B, pianist Toussaint made his name writing foot-stomping hits for others, including "Mother-in-Law" (for Ernie K-Doe) and "Working in the Coal Mine" (for Lee Dorsey). His own '70s works on this luminous two-disc set are less brash yet still funky, wrapping his delicate voice in melodies as sweet as a warm summer breeze. It features the dreamy "Southern Nights," a smash for Glen Campbell.

Tom Jones regrets having tried the shrimp.

TOM VERLAINE

FLASH LIGHT ✪✪✪✪

COLLECTORS' CHOICE

On this 1987 solo album, his fifth, the erstwhile Television frontman reins in the poetic navel-gazing and rocks out a bit more. If the material occasionally sputters, Verlaine's spidery guitar and eye-rolling vocals never lack feverish grandeur. "Bomb" and "A Town Called Walker" cast an ominously alluring spell, while "At 4 A.M." almost sounds playful, in a creepy, Lou Reed way.

From top: Adrian Boot/Retna Ltd.; Michael Ochs Archives

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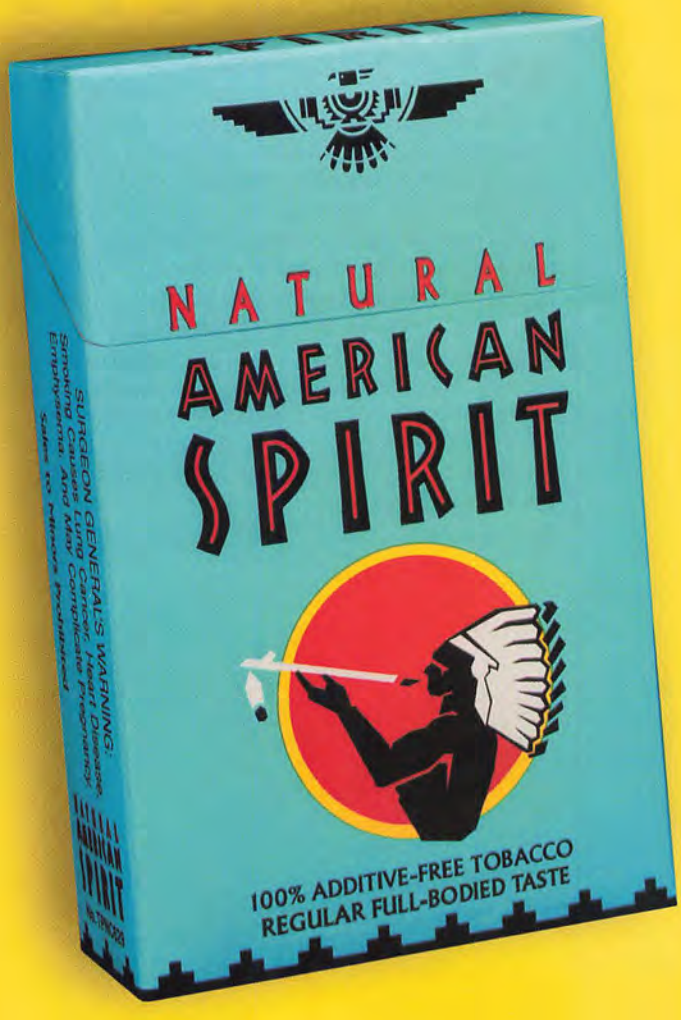

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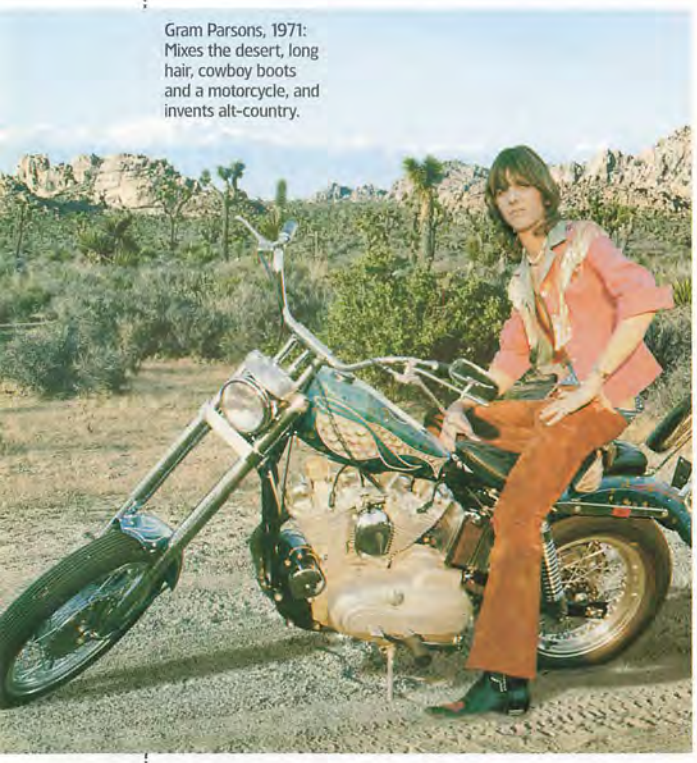
EVERY ORIGINAL CD REVIEWED

GRAM PARSONS

Born in Waycross, Georgia, on November 5, 1946, Cecil Ingram Connor III became Gram Parsons in 1958 when his father, an Air Force major, blew his head off with a .38, and his mother, a wealthy citrus magnate, married Robert Parsons. Dashing, druggy and charismatic, Gram Parsons played rock (in the Legends), folk (the Shilos) and country (International Submarine Band), then hypnotized the Byrds and even the Rolling Stones with his self-styled vision of "cosmic American music," midwifing alt-country via the Flying Burrito Brothers and a brace of uncanny solo albums. He overdosed on morphine and tequila in September 1973, leaving a bijou catalog and a corpse that was kidnapped by his "executive nanny" and burned in the Mojave desert. Weird.
By Tony Power



Gram Parsons, 1971: Mixes the desert, long hair, cowboy boots and a motorcycle, and invents alt-country.

BLENDER APPROVED

THE BYRDS
SWEETHEART OF THE RODEO
COLUMBIA, 1968
★★★★★

Parsons's golden period began in 1967, when he met Byrds bassist Chris Hillman. They bonded over old country sides, inspiring the first "country-rock" album of any merit. Better still, 2003's Deluxe Edition turns *Sweetheart* into a Parsons album in all but name, with a smattering of International Submarine Band tracks joining a gunnysack of outtakes with Parsons vocals. An electrifying collaboration — and, er, the Byrds' worst-selling album to that point.
Standout tracks: "Hickory Wind," "The Christian Life"

GRAM PARSONS
GRIEVOUS ANGEL *REPRISE, 1974*
★★★★★

Parsons was in a bad way in mid-1973. His marriage was failing, and he was shooting smack and reeling from his stepfather's admission that he had given Gram's mother booze as she lay dying in a hospital. Out of the turmoil came his posthumously released second album, beautifully sung and deftly backed by Elvis Presley's Vegas band.
Standout tracks: "Brass Buttons," "In My Hour of Darkness"

GRAM PARSONS
SACRED HEARTS AND FALLEN ANGELS
THE GRAM PARSONS ANTHOLOGY
RHINO, 2001
★★★★★

CAREER OVERVIEW

Parsons's psychedelic worldview can be traced to his childhood, popping funny pills out of his alcoholic mom's bathroom cabinet. Over 46 tracks, this full career retrospective showcases his uniquely wonky perspective on traditional music, starting with International Submarine Band's country-rock blueprint, "Blue Eyes," and ending with Parsons and Emmylou Harris's keening "The Angels Rejoiced Last Night." Providing continuity is that voice, not always confident or even in tune, but always striving for something transcendent.
Standout tracks: "Luxury Liner," "Hot Burrito #1," "Return of the Grievous Angel"

GREAT

THE FLYING BURRITO BROS.
THE GILDED PALACE OF SIN
A&M, 1969
★★★★

In 1968, Parsons walked out on the Byrds as they prepared to play South Africa — complaining that he had seen enough segregation to last a lifetime — and took up with the Rolling Stones, playing them George Jones and inspiring *Let It Bleed*'s "Country Honk." Months later, he persuaded a still-livid Chris Hillman to join him in the Burritos, an irreverent synthesis of country, Southern soul and West Coast rock. Crazy name, crazy guys.
Standout tracks: "Christine's Tune," "Hot Burrito #1," "Do Right Woman"

GRAM PARSONS
GP *REPRISE, 1973*
★★★★

Frozen out of the Stones' *Exile on Main Street* sessions for being too much of a drug monster, Parsons recruited the rump of Elvis Presley's band, masters of commercial, hopped-up roots music unfazed by even Parsons's most impressionistic ballads ("My land is like a wild goose," goes "A Song for You"). *GP* remains his most down-home effort, with muse Emmylou Harris debuting in her hand-wringing, ministering angel role. Essential.
Standout tracks: "A Song for You," "She"

THE FLYING BURRITO BROS.
HOT BURRITOS!
THE FLYING BURRITO BROS. ANTHOLOGY 1969–1972 *A&M, 2000*
★★★★

Sessions for *The Gilded Palace of Sin* were so "relaxed," one drummer fainted off his stool. The under-rehearsed ambience didn't appeal to country fans, however: The Burritos proved a commercial non-starter, although they survived Parsons's 1970 departure, continuing with Rick Roberts on vocals. *Hot Burritos!* offers almost every Parsons-era Burritos track in strict chronological order, making it the best FBB compilation, and "Hot Burrito #1" — a beautiful Parsons/Chris Ethridge love song — begs for inclusion on any all-time list.
Standout track: "Dark End of the Street"

Reanne Rubenstein/Greg Allen

CHECK IT OUT

INTERNATIONAL SUBMARINE BAND
SAFE AT HOME *SHILOH, 1968*
✪✪✪

EARLY AND WEIRD

In 1966, Parsons was dropping acid, dropping out of Harvard and being turned on to Buck Owens. The result: proto-Burrito songs ("Luxury Liner" the best) presaging the hipper country-rock to come.
Standout track: "Luxury Liner"

THE FLYING BURRITO BROS.
BURRITO DELUXE *A&M, 1970*
✪✪✪

The Burritos' second and last album with Parsons focuses on up-tempo material. "Older Guys" is a wry, straight-ish rocker, while "Wild Horses" is a Jagger-Richards cover that actually beat the "original" onto vinyl. Parsons was on his way.
Standout tracks: "Cody, Cody," "Older Guys"

GRAM PARSONS & THE FALLEN ANGELS
LIVE 1973 *SIERRA, 1982*
✪✪✪

Parsons couldn't afford to tour the *GP* band, and there's a second-best feel to this group. Even so, they lash into "Drug Store Truck Drivin' Man," a mean cracker-baiter written by Parsons and Roger McGuinn after the traditional country market rejected *Sweetheart of the Rodeo.*
Standout track: "Love Hurts"

GRAM PARSONS
ANOTHER SIDE OF THIS LIFE
THE LOST RECORDINGS OF GRAM PARSONS 1965–1966 *SUNDAZED, 2000*
✪✪✪

Captured between the Shilos (his early-'60s folk troupe) and ISB, Parsons grabs an acoustic guitar and lays down a batch of folk standards, a Shilos number ("Zah's Blues") and "Brass Buttons," a song for his mother, who died of alcohol poisoning the day he graduated from high school.
Standout track: "November Nights"

BE CAREFUL

GRAM PARSONS/ THE FLYING BURRITO BROS.
SLEEPLESS NIGHTS *A&M, 1976*
✪✪

An awkward patchwork of tracks recorded by the Burritos in 1970 just before Parsons's departure, plus a clutch of *Grievous Angel* outtakes from 1973. Of the former, the elegiac "Close Up the Honky Tonks" is a must-have (though it's also now available on the *Hot Burritos!* anthology); of the latter, the title track offers Parsons and Emmylou Harris at their most tactile and lovelorn — though they were never a couple.
Standout tracks: "Close Up the Honky Tonks," "Sleepless Nights"

GRAM PARSONS
WARM EVENINGS, PALE MORNINGS, BOTTLED BLUES 1963–1973
RAVEN, 1992
✪✪

An inadequate 24-track career collection from an Australian label, notable for "Zah's Blues" in its full Shilos "glory" (think *A Mighty Wind*–style harmony-folk). The only significant Shilos compilation is currently out of print (look in thrift stores for *Gram Parsons — The Early Years* on Sierra). Here, there's no "Hot Burrito #2," "In My Hour of Darkness," "Luxury Liner," etc. . . .
Standout track: "Zah's Blues"

THE FLYING BURRITO BROS.
SIN CITY
THE VERY BEST OF
UNIVERSAL, 2002
✪✪

Not a bad start for those with a casual interest or a short attention span, this includes all of *The Gilded Palace of Sin.* Others will find 25 tracks a tad miserly when spending just a little more will get you 40-plus elsewhere. Even so, here's a chance to enjoy "My Uncle," Parsons's deft bid to connect hippie draft dodgers with the Dixie rebel tradition.
Standout tracks: "Hot Burrito #2," "Six Days on the Road"

FOR FANS ONLY

THE FLYING BURRITO BROS.
FARTHER ALONG *A&M, 1988*
✪✪

Twenty-one tracks, but no "Little Hippie Boy" (Chris Hillman's hilarious preacher-style monologue that closed *The Gilded Palace of Sin*) or — for shame! — *Burrito Deluxe*'s best song, "Older Guys." A fragment of Bob Dylan's "I Shall Be Released" is scant reward for favoring this compilation over any of the others.
Standout tracks: The usual suspects

THE FLYING BURRITO BROS.
20TH CENTURY MASTERS — THE MILLENNIUM COLLECTION
THE BEST OF THE FLYING BURRITO BROTHERS *A&M, 2001*
✪

BUYER BEWARE

When asked shortly before his death what he thought about the still-touring Flying Burrito Brothers (even Hillman and guitarists "Sneaky Pete" Kleinow and Bernie Leadon had left by then), Parsons said he felt like a "mother hen whose eggs have been broken." Perhaps it's just as well that he never lived to see his legacy milked this shamelessly. Warning: Does not contain "Hot Burrito #1"!
Standout tracks: The usual suspects, minus "Hot Burrito #1"

GRAM PARSONS
BIG MOUTH BLUES
A CONVERSATION WITH GRAM PARSONS *SIERRA, 2002*
✪

Named for the autobiographical *GP* rocker in which Parsons bemoans his tendency to shoot off his mouth, this 69-minute interview disc is the nearest you'll get to the inside of his head. True to form, he slags Chris Ethridge and Byrds/Burritos drummer Michael Clarke for being bad at country-rock. The bitch!

FURTHER LISTENING

EMMYLOU HARRIS
ELITE HOTEL
REPRISE, 1975
✪✪✪

Harris was Tammy Wynette to Parsons's counter-cultural George Jones and kept his posthumous reputation afloat. Her schoolmarm approach is best illustrated on "Sin City," a Burritos satire delivered with God-fearing sincerity.

FURTHER READING

GRAM PARSONS: A MUSIC BIOGRAPHY
BY SID GRIFFIN
SIERRA BOOKS, 1985
✪✪✪✪

Griffin delivers the best blend of music and shenanigans (Parsons stole David Crosby's girlfriend Nancy Ross in 1966), getting great stuff out of Chris Hillman and Peter Fonda and running in full the 1972 Chuck Cassell interview that was edited for *Big Mouth Blues.*

FURTHER VIEWING

GIMME SHELTER
CRITERION COLLECTION, 1970
✪✪✪✪✪

The movie of Altamont, the Rolling Stones' infamous 1969 rock festival. The Burritos' set is represented by just one song, "Six Days on the Road," and then it's back to watching Mick Jagger and Keith Richards fop around backstage before the '60s end in bloodshed orchestrated by the Hell's Angels.

Touring company of *Cats*, or a Cher concert?

DRESSED FOR EXCESS

Ending her farewell tour, Cher lays on the glitz, then calls J.Lo and Britney "bitches" during Halloween campfest

CHER

SKYDOME, TORONTO

OCTOBER 31, 2003 ✪✪✪

CHER ISN'T SOMEONE who ever needs an excuse to dress up, but Halloween demands extra effort. Toronto's SkyDome is teeming with angels, devils, priests, nuns, pirates, sailors and multiple characters from *The Wizard of Oz*. One ingenious individual, festooned with purple balls, has come as the Grapes of Wrath. Yet Cher trumps them all: She emerges from her dressing room resplendent in a billowing black dress, a feather collar and a witch's hat that's tall enough to conceal a small child.

"This is ridiculous," she tells *Blender*, sweeping regally toward the stage. "Even more ridiculous than my usual opening outfit."

Tonight is the 200th date of a farewell tour that has pulled in $145 million since June 2002. There will be two final shows upcoming in Las Vegas, but for Cher, every city is Vegas. When she's lowered onstage inside a giant chandelier, looking like the Wicked Witch of the West and singing a frantic Eurodisco version of U2's "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," you know that restraint is not an option.

While some gay icons may bristle at their careers being perceived as a camp joke, Cher is happy to cheekily play along. "I'm only serious when I'm not working," she explains.

It has been 40 years since Sonny Bono discovered young Cherilyn Sarkisian, and her longevity is due to the simple fact that musical trends come and go, but trash is timeless. As, it seems, is Cher. She and her plastic surgeon have apparently taken the lyrics to "If I Could Turn Back Time" literally, and at 57, she actually looks younger than she does onscreen during the retrospective video medleys. At this rate, within a few years she'll start getting carded in bars. As she quips onscreen, "After a nuclear holocaust, there'll be cockroaches and Cher."

I STILL HAVEN'T FOUND
WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR
SONG FOR THE LONELY
ALL OR NOTHING
I FOUND SOMEONE
BANG BANG
ALL I REALLY WANT TO DO
HALF BREED
GYPSIES, TRAMPS & THIEVES
DARK LADY
TAKE ME HOME
AFTER ALL
SHOOP SHOOP
STRONG ENOUGH
IF I COULD TURN BACK TIME
BELIEVE

Sonny Bono impersonator or Ron Jeremy fan? You decide!

For one Bollywood-themed song, she appears riding two guys who are dressed in an elephant suit. For another, she stalks the stage in black leather and fishnets, looking like Christina Aguilera's dominatrix stepmother. And during a melodramatic rendition of the '60s Sonny and Cher hit "Bang Bang (My Baby Shot Me Down)," she wears an enormous feather headdress, presumably as the world's least subtle reference to her Cherokee roots. Entertaining though they are, her costume changes unfortunately

Alphonse Telymonde (still-life)

"Anyone seen my curtains?"

"Anyone seen my Twizzlers?"

"Anyone seen my poodle?"

"Anyone seen Sonny?"

leave a lot of time to kill. The *Cirque du Soleil*–style acrobatic dancers are diverting enough. The fiddly guitar solos played by a middle-aged man in sunglasses are not.

The video medleys, which look uncomfortably like VH1 obituaries, are equally patchy. One of them shows Cher duetting with everybody from Liberace to a Muppet (actually, not that big a leap), while another rounds up highlights of her celluloid career. *Moonstruck* gets a huge cheer; *Tea With Mussolini* not so much. When a clip from the nuclear-industry drama *Silkwood* comes on, thousands of people whoop the phrase *genetic deformities* in unison. Who knew radiation poisoning was so fabulous?

That's the problem with "the Cherest show on earth." It's so relentlessly throwaway that everything is reduced to the same level. Every number, whether it's "The Shoop Shoop Song," "Believe" or her 1965 debut hit, "All I Really Want to Do," becomes a kitsch bauble to be enjoyed with a smirk. Nobody expects her to sound like Bob Dylan, but her show feels like a week in Vegas, when you meant to spend only a weekend. It looks expensive, but it feels cheap.

If it is one long in-joke, though, it's one everybody inside SkyDome seems to be in on, and Cher is plainly enjoying herself. Wearing a ringmaster's coat and wielding a whip, she delivers her tart opening spiel with such relish that it's a surprise to learn she's been using the same one, almost word for word, for 16 months.

Promising that this really *is* her last tour, because, she says, she doesn't want to be touring with

Steven Cojacaru advises Cher on taste and class.

"boobs down to my kneecaps," she passes the baton to Britney Spears and Jennifer Lopez. Then, with a flourish, she snatches it right back. "You girls who are just coming up," she snarls, sounding like Cruella DeVil, "follow this, you bitches!" How could they? *DORIAN LYNSKEY*

"This is ridiculous," Cher tells *Blender*. "Even more ridiculous than my usual opening outfit." ★

"If you love plastic surgery, raise your right hand!"

HOW'D YOU LIKE THE SHOW? SKYDOME, TORONTO, OCTOBER 31, 2003

MARIO TUNZI
35, TEACHER, TORONTO
"I saw her at the beginning of the tour and came back for the end. It's a little bit better now. The dance show was amazing. She always has good special effects."

ROBIN HIGGINS
27, SOCIAL WORKER, TORONTO
"I've been on a road trip to Pennsylvania, Michigan and Vancouver, and this was the worst show I've been to of all of them, not what it should've been. Maybe she's tired."

SUZANNE MACLEOD
35, BAR OWNER, TORONTO
"I've never thought of being a drag queen, but I'm so tempted. That was the best, most entertaining, most visually stimulating show I've ever seen. It was spectacular."

KEVIN MCKITRICK
38, EVENT PLANNER, GUELPH, ONTARIO
"We were in the front row, two feet away. Her sweat was bouncing off my face. She's flamboyant, and God knows we all like dressing up."

Neal Preston (Cher, 6); George Pimental (How'd You Like the Show?, 4)

THE GOOD!

PAST TENSE

Your future is in the hands of a history-hopping Ashton Kutcher. By Clark Collis

THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

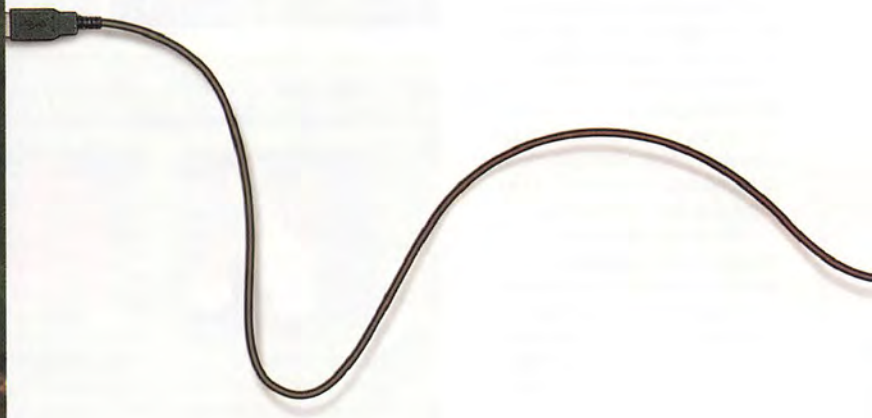
DIRECTED BY Eric Bress and J. Mackye Gruber

STARRING Ashton Kutcher, Amy Smart, Melora Walters, Eric Stoltz

GIVEN A TIME machine, your reviewer would, naturally, zap back to meet the young Adolf Hitler and, if not kill the bastard outright, at least convince him to stick with the painting thing instead of the taking-over-the-world thing. But second on our list of whose future to alter would be Ashton Kutcher, whose TV-dominating, Demi-squiring omnipresence has now reached unacceptably irritating levels.

At least that was the case before we saw the utterly preposterous but hugely enjoyable *Butterfly Effect*, which vividly illustrates the dangers of messing around with the past. Kutcher plays a college student who can't remember chunks of his childhood. This is a good thing, given

Shane Harvey



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that his formative years contained such traumas as watching his dog be burned alive and nearly getting killed by his nuthatch-dwelling pa.

But in a journal reading–related plot development best not examined too closely, our hero develops the ability to reinhabit his younger self's body and change history. Hurrah! Except that every time he returns to the present, he discovers that his temporal tinkering has actually made matters worse. In the wake of one backward trip, for example, he discovers that his true love (Amy Smart) has become a crack whore and, in an even grimmer scenario, he has turned into a douchebag frat boy.

In short, what could have been a fuzzy time-travel comedy à la *Back to the Future* turns out to be a neo-horror film of much more entertainingly nasty dimensions (you will not believe the scene in which Kutcher travels back in time to give himself stigmata scars).

True, a fair amount of the dialogue plain stinks, and the *Punk'd* frontman looks mildly uncomfortable in whatever alternate present he has created. But *The Butterfly Effect*, which Kutcher also executive-produced, must already be a strong contender for the most unexpectedly entertaining release of the year. Not to mention the only one to feature a vastly overweight goth sex god, Eric Stoltz as the world's suavest child molester and a reference to "donkey acts."

Shane Harvey (The Butterfly Effect); The Everett Collection (Schwarzenegger, Back to the Future)

DUDE, WHERE'S MY TIME MACHINE?

Four ways you really *can* go back to the future (or past!)

CRYOGENICS
Just like Woody Allen in *Sleeper*, you can have your ass frozen by the Cryonics Institute of Clinton, Michigan, for revival decades, centuries or even millennia later, all for the low, low cost of $28,000. Say hi to Dr. Zaius for us!

BLACK HOLES
Some scientists hypothesize that black holes may act as time portals to some crazy future when cyborgs rule the earth — or Arnold Schwarzenegger is governor of California. Sadly, they also hypothesize that traveling through them would turn you into subatomic goulash.

THE INTERNATIONAL DATE LINE
Travel from east to west across the Date Line, and you're one whole day in the future! True story: This is how David Lee Roth managed never to have a thirtieth birthday, which accounts for his ageless appearance.

HYPNOTISM
Via hypnotic age regression, it is now possible for your gray matter to travel back in time and relive being fondled at the Fourth of July picnic by "Uncle" Pete. Thanks, psychiatry!

Knight Rider Returns! was not a success.

The 1" LYRA mp3 Mini Jukebox.

Plug in to about 40 hours of music:

Plug in to 1.5 GB of storage.

Plug in to really big music in a really tiny box.

Plug in to what's out there.

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THE BAD!

MINDHUNTERS

DIRECTED BY Renny Harlin

STARRING Val Kilmer, LL Cool J, Christian Slater, Jonny Lee Miller

IMAGINE WHAT would happen if all those Clarice Starling types in the FBI's serial-killer psychological-profiling program were stranded on an island only to discover that one of them was actually a homicidal maniac. Now imagine the chances of that intriguing premise being turned into a good movie by Renny Harlin, the man responsible for such witless schlock as *Cutthroat Island*. Now imagine that the big stars in the cast deliver only cameos, leaving most of the predictable action and risible dialogue to the likes of *Trainspotting*'s Jonny Lee Miller. Now imagine yourself seeing something else.

& THE INDIE!

MONSTER

DIRECTED BY Patty Jenkins

STARRING Charlize Theron, Christina Ricci, Bruce Dern, Pruitt Taylor Vince

FEW ACTRESSES HAVE been as ill-treated by Hollywood as Charlize Theron, who has spent the last decade playing "blonde girlfriend" in umpteen crappy movies like *The Devil's Advocate* and *Reindeer Games*. In fact, to get people to appreciate her talents, she would probably have to do something like get fat and play a serial killer from Florida — which is exactly what she's doing in *Monster*. Based on the real-life story of Aileen Wuornos, a prostitute who was executed for killing seven men, the film also stars Bruce Dern, Christina Ricci and Bubba Baker, who gets a name-check just because he's called Bubba.

BLENDER APPROVED

The best **MOVIES** of the last three months

PAYCHECK

Whaddya mean, "better than *Gigli*" isn't much of a recommendation? OK, how about "John Woo's best film since *Face/Off*"?

BAD SANTA

Festive story courtesy of the Coen Brothers. Drunk-ass, sticky-fingered Kris Kringle courtesy of Billy Bob Thornton.

LAST GOOD MOVIE YOU SAW?

JONATHAN DAVIS
Korn lead singer, bagpiper

"The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers. It just makes you feel as though you're in that world. The way that it looks and how grand it is — it's just amazing."

AND THE REST...

DON'T MISS

COLD MOUNTAIN

DIRECTED BY Anthony Minghella

STARRING Jude Law, Nicole Kidman, Renée Zellweger, Natalie Portman

THE PITCH Wounded Civil War soldier Law embarks on a perilous journey to reunite with his sweetheart. Why bother? She's played by Nicole Kidman!

THE VERDICT This season's most obvious Oscar bait also finds screen time for Jack White, who contributes to the soundtrack.

MIRACLE

DIRECTED BY Gavin O'Connor

STARRING Kurt Russell, Eddie Cahill, Patricia Clarkson, Nathan West

THE PITCH The true story of how the U.S. ice hockey team defeated its supposedly invincible Russkie foes at the 1980 Olympics.

THE VERDICT Twenty-six years after *Slap Shot*, we're well overdue for another good hockey-themed flick. Do we hear "*Rocky* with pucks"? You bet your ice-cold ass we do.

THE PERFECT SCORE

DIRECTED BY Brian Robbins

STARRING Scarlett Johansson, Erika Christensen, Chris Evans, Darius Miles

THE PITCH A mixed bunch of high-school seniors conspire to steal the answers to their SAT exams by breaking into the testing center.

THE VERDICT Neat concept. Competent director. Oh, what's the point in denying it: After *Lost in Translation*, we'd watch Scarlett Johansson mix cement.

DON'T RUSH

ALONG CAME POLLY

DIRECTED BY John Hamburg

STARRING Ben Stiller, Jennifer Aniston, Debra Messing, Philip Seymour Hoffman

THE PITCH Married, risk-averse risk analyzer Stiller begins an affair with the free-spirited Aniston. That's right: It sounds *risky*.

THE VERDICT It would also sound dreadful, except for the quality of the cast and, most importantly, director Hamburg, who previously penned *Zoolander* and *Meet the Parents*.

TORQUE

DIRECTED BY Joseph Kahn

STARRING Ice Cube, Martin Henderson

THE PITCH Cube is head of the most feared biker gang in the country — which is bad news for Henderson (*The Ring*) when he's framed for the murder of the rapper's brother.

THE VERDICT Kahn directed Eminem's "Without Me" clip, and Ice Cube is always watchable. But you could always wait until *Barbershop 2* in March to do the watching.

DON'T BOTHER

CHASING LIBERTY

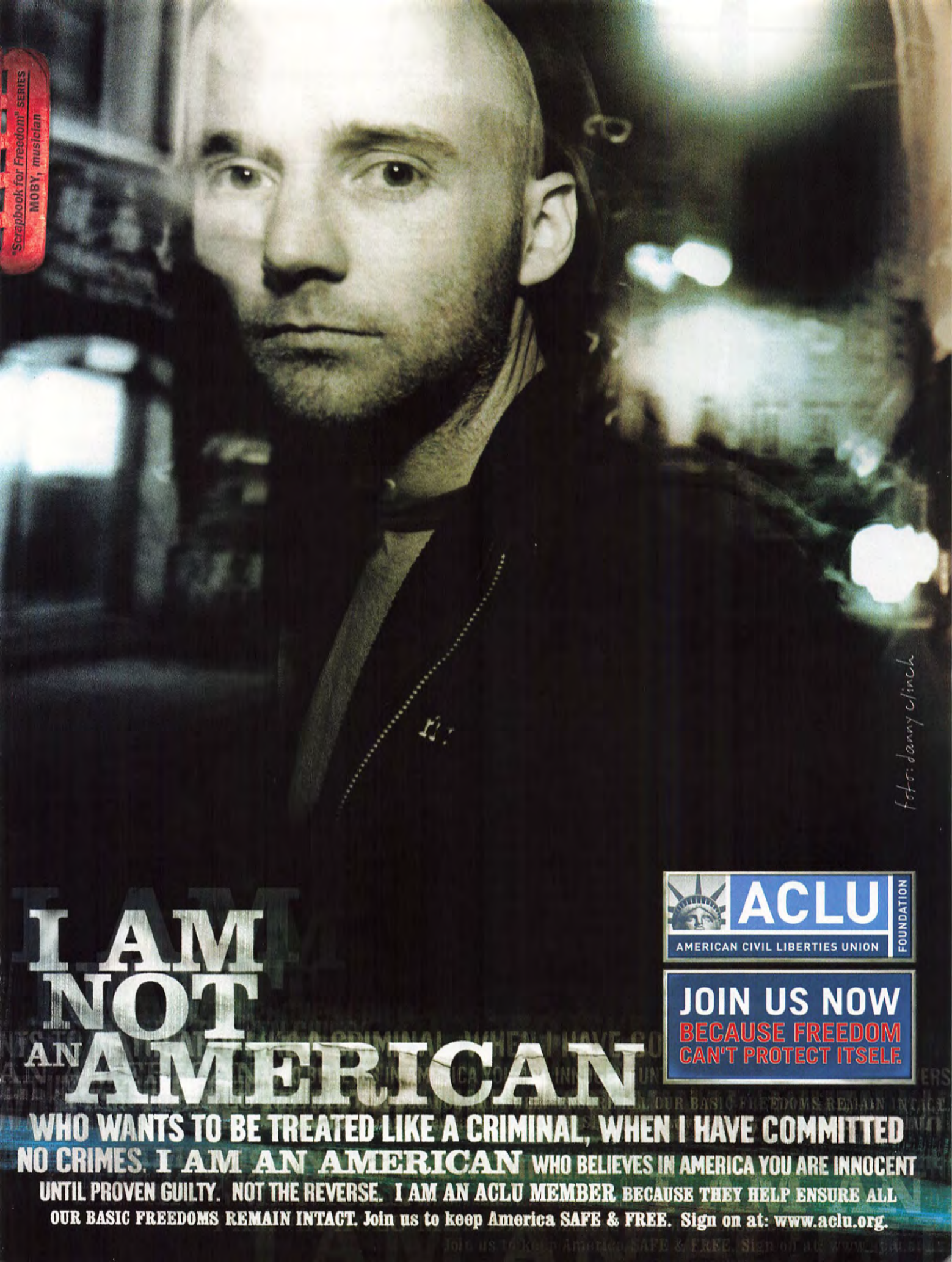
DIRECTED BY Andy Cadiff

STARRING Mandy Moore, Matthew Goode, Jeremy Piven, Annabella Sciorra

THE PITCH The president's little girl ditches her Secret Service agents and runs off to Europe — with romantic consequences!

THE VERDICT Not to be confused with the almost identically plotted *First Daughter*, starring Katie Holmes. On second thought, actually, confuse away!

Gene Page (Monster); Tracy Bennett (Bad Santa, Along Came Polly); Stephen Lovekin/FilmMagic.com (Davis); courtesy of Miramax (Cold Mountain); Chris Large (Miracle); Doug Curran (Paycheck, The Perfect Score); Richard Foreman (Torque); Jaap Buitendijk/Warner Bros. (Chasing Liberty)


"Scrapbook for Freedom" SERIES
MOBY, musician
foto: danny clinch
I AM NOT AN AMERICAN
ACLU
AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION
FOUNDATION
JOIN US NOW
BECAUSE FREEDOM CAN'T PROTECT ITSELF.
WHO WANTS TO BE TREATED LIKE A CRIMINAL, WHEN I HAVE COMMITTED NO CRIMES. I AM AN AMERICAN WHO BELIEVES IN AMERICA YOU ARE INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY. NOT THE REVERSE. I AM AN ACLU MEMBER BECAUSE THEY HELP ENSURE ALL OUR BASIC FREEDOMS REMAIN INTACT. Join us to keep America SAFE & FREE. Sign on at: www.aclu.org.

Yoko Ono: "I call this piece 'Man Playing Stupid Guitar.'"

IMAGINE THAT

A new Beatle bio offers little real insight — but lots of fake memorabilia. Yay! By Clark Collis

LENNON LEGEND
AN ILLUSTRATED LIFE OF JOHN LENNON

By James Henke

✪✪✪✪ *CHRONICLE BOOKS, $40*

WHAT DOES IT say about a society that values celebrity so highly that a piece of toast *almost* eaten by George Harrison is considered worthy for auction? Who cares? Frankly, we're too busy trying to scratch off the REPRODUCTION labels that adorn the John Lennon–related document facsimiles secreted in this new biography so we can auction them and buy our dream house in Aspen.

A big house it would be, too, given the wealth of faux memorabilia on display in this tome — a companion to the DVD of the same name — from a predictably patchy report card to a ticket for the Beatles' appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show* to a reproduction of Lennon's handwritten lyrics to "Starting Over."

True, some of the more Yoko Ono–influenced "artistic" artifacts seem even more gnomic or absurd now than they must have then. But the materials here are still a compelling and oddly effective way of bringing the late Beatle to life. Moreover, the emotions they stir are further amplified by a CD of interview material. The book's text, penned by Rock and Roll Hall of Fame curator James Henke, is unlikely to offer many surprises. As a package, however, *Lennon Legend* stands as a brilliant — if sadly toast-free — piece of work.

A sampling of memorabilia facsimiles from *Lennon Legend*

ARE WE NOT MEN? WE ARE DEVO!

By Jade Dellinger and David Giffels

✪✪✪ *SAF PUBLISHING, $30*

With their flowerpot hats, weird, home-baked philosophy and robotic rock, Devo were as much an art project as a band. Jade Dellinger and David Giffels do an admirable job of describing that project's evolution, painting a detailed portrait of the Akron, Ohio, scene that produced Devo, and pinpointing where the guys first encountered the word *devolution* (in a Wonder Woman comic). But there's little sense here of the men behind the masks — and after taking 157 pages to get to the release of Devo's debut album, the authors skim over the next 25 years in a mere 40 pages.

J.D. CONSIDINE

BROKEN MUSIC

By Sting

✪✪✪ *DIAL BOOKS, $26*

Some people take their navel-gazing very seriously, and certainly, with this stylishly written but seemingly endless memoir, Sting appears to consider his inner life on par with Hamlet's. It begins in 1987 with the singer and his wife, Trudie Styler, undergoing a religious ritual in Brazil involving a mind-blowing drink called *ayahuasca;* the vivid visions inspired a reexamination of his past that culminates with this book. Frustratingly, his eight-year stint with the Police merits barely a paragraph from breakthrough to breakup. The background he does explore at length — his parents' unhappy marriage, new-band hardships — isn't terribly extraordinary, so the sheer weight of the memories here offers a certain whiff of self-importance. *Quelle surprise!*

STEVE LOWE

THE ENCYCLÖPEDIA ÖF HEAVY METAL

By Daniel Bukszpan. Foreword by Ronnie James Dio

✪✪✪ *BARNES & NOBLE BOOKS, $20*

This A-to-Z of all things metal boasts nicely opinionated entries from author Daniel Bukszpan (who memorably describes late-'80s Whitesnake as something "from which humankind is still collectively recovering") and an abundance of awesome vintage photographs (Gwar covered in blood! Danzig covered in blood! Judas Priest, er, on rollerskates!). True, the absence of some bands seems inexplicable, particularly ZZ Top — did the publisher run out of pages? But it's hard to complain about the wealth of rock-tastic tidbits. Hey, did you know that Welsh folk-metallers Budgie had a song called "Nude Disintegrating Parachutist Woman"?

CLARK COLLIS

ESCAPING THE DELTA
ROBERT JOHNSON AND THE INVENTION OF THE BLUES

By Elijah Wald

✪✪✪ *AMISTAD PRESS/HARPERCOLLINS, $25*

Blues musician Elijah Wald takes a seemingly unique approach to the story of the blues — he tells it as it really happened, and not as how it makes better sense in relation to the modern music business. Hung on Robert Johnson's supernova career, this account shows the blues as not simply the plaintive work songs of an oppressed people but a vibrant, varied, comparatively urbane pop music with stars who were exactly that — stars. There might only be two photos of Johnson in existence, yet they're enough to show how sharp his suits were. Importantly, Wald has researched beyond what is available on record, as only the smallest percentage of blues actually got recorded, and what has survived is a very narrow catalog of what today's record executives think it should sound like. This is a vivid, fascinating and valuable tale that almost manages to transcend Wald's humorless, textbook-style prose.

LLOYD BRADLEY

JOHNNY CASH
THE LIFE OF AN AMERICAN ICON

By Stephen Miller

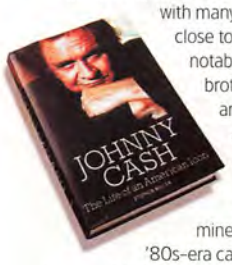
✪✪ *OMNIBUS PRESS, $30*

Given that hundreds, if not thousands, of journalists were fortunate enough to interview the Man in Black

Alphonse Telymonde (still-lifes, 81); Tom Hanley/Camera Press/Retna Ltd. (Lennon and Ono)

while he was alive, it seems somewhat ludicrous that the first major biography published since his death should be penned by one who didn't. To be fair, Stephen Miller did speak with many of those close to Cash, notably his brother Tommy, and he adequately covers the man's amphetamine-fueled rise, '80s-era career collapse and Rick Rubin–assisted rebirth. He even offers a few surprises — apparently Cash loved to sew, and he was once surreally hailed as a lesbian icon by feminist writer Teresa Ortega. But the book remains a depressingly bloodless affair that pales in comparison to the man's cruder but considerably more engaging autobiography.

CLARK COLLIS



ZAGAT SURVEY MUSIC GUIDE

Edited by Betsy Andrews and Randi Gollin

✪✪ *ZAGAT SURVEY, $15*

It's hard to imagine who this 330-page, enthusiast-ranked music guide could possibly appeal to. The quotation-happy connoisseurs at Zagat have set out to name the "1,000 top albums of all time" but succeed only in proving that while their format may work well for metropolitan restaurants, it falls far short when it comes to mainstream music. There are glaring omissions — no *Under Construction* by Missy Elliott or Interpol's *Turn on the Bright Lights* — while the reviewers' reliance on bite-size epigrams leads to the worst kind of rock cliché. Roberta Flack's *Softly With These Songs* reminds us that "the woman has soul," while Bruce Springsteen remains "the indisputable Boss." If you've spent the last 40 years free from the influence of pop culture, this could be the guide for you.

LAUREN HARRIS

SCARY MONSTERS AND SUPER FREAKS

STORIES OF SEX, DRUGS, ROCK 'N' ROLL AND MURDER

By Mike Sager

✪✪✪✪ *THUNDER'S MOUTH PRESS, $16*

There's only one combination more potent than sex, drugs, and rock & roll: sex, drugs, rock & roll and murder. Journalist Mike Sager shakes up that lethal cocktail with this collection of articles, originally published in magazines such as *GQ* and *Esquire*. Among the many highlights are a jailhouse interview with a crack-wrecked Rick James and a report on a trio of drug-dazzled Texas teens who murdered an undercover cop after a Ouija board told them to. Sager spent an average of five months reporting each story; the result is 19 rattling tales of true crime as compelling as any fiction.

JON REGARDIE

Rick James: "Honk, honk!"

THE BEST PART OF A BIG BOOK!

San Francisco, 1981: "Superfreak" singer **Rick James** meets his hero, Sly Stone, and is introduced to freebasing cocaine

"NOBODY KNEW COKE was so bad at the time," says James. "Nobody knew anything about detox. There was no Betty Ford. When you snorted it you could function just fine. We made records doing it, sitting at the console with ounce-full bags. It was just part of life. Everybody kept a big box full of pills: Quaaludes, Valium, Halcyon. Dishes of cocaine, trash bags of weed, bottles of bourbon. It was all about hey, good drugs, leather clothes, horses, cars and fucking women. That was the criteria for the times. When we went on tour, my accountants figured out that we were spending like $250,000 on coke for everybody. They wrote it off as payment to this employee they named Jose Coca."

"We were spending $250,000 on coke for everybody." ★

In the spring of 1981, James and [saxophonist Danny] Lamelle went to see Sly Stone in San Francisco. Sly was freebasing — sitting in a back room at a recording studio with his butane torch and his pipe, totally out of it. "When we left, Rick turns to me and says: 'Look, we smoke herb, we snort, we drink. But we will never do this. Sly is a legend. He's in the history books. Now look at him, and he did this to himself with this drug. We can never allow this to happen to us.' Right there, on the spot, we made a bond that this would never be."

A few days later, in a hotel room in Chicago, James took his first hit of freebase, supplied by one of the leaders of the fabled Blackstone Rangers.

A few days after that, James flew back out to the coast, went to see Sly again. This time, he joined him in the back room. They stayed in there for a solid week.

Excerpted from *Scary Monsters and Super Freaks: Stories of Sex, Drugs, Rock 'N' Roll and Murder*, © 2003 by Mike Sager. Reprinted with permission from Thunder's Mouth Press.

BLENDER APPROVED

The best BOOKS of the last three months

THE VICE GUIDE TO SEX AND DRUGS AND ROCK AND ROLL

Edited by Suroosh Alvi, Gavin McInnes and Shane Smith

WARNER BOOKS

A best-of anthology from the shockingly funny hipster bible.

DESIGNED BY PETER SAVILLE

Edited by Emily King

BLUEBIRD

An achingly gorgeous collection chronicling 25 years of work by the influential graphic designer and Factory Records cofounder.

Richard Young/Rex Features (James)

Sean Connery's housekeeper is so fired.

MISFIRE

These Victorian superheroes make for a great comic book — but a lousy movie. By Clark Collis

THE LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY GENTLEMEN

DIRECTED BY Stephen Norrington

STARRING Sean Connery, Peta Wilson, Stuart Townsend, Jason Flemyng

20TH CENTURY FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪

» ON HOLLYWOOD executives' big list of Things That Will Never Appear in a Summer Blockbuster, you can bet "death by sodomy" ranks pretty damn high. And that's no bad thing. Even those of us who are accustomed to seeing all sorts of cinematic gruesomeness — beheadings, disembowelings, Renée Zellweger romantic comedies — can stand only so much before those recently eaten salty treats buy a return ticket.

Which is why it was probably a mistake to adapt Alan Moore's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* for the big screen. A sort of nineteenth-century *X-Men*, the ongoing cult comic concerns a group of evil-fighting literary characters and recently featured one of them (H.G. Wells's Invisible Man) being fatally, ahem, assaulted by another (Robert Louis Stevenson's Mr. Hyde). And remember, these guys are supposed to be the *heroes*.

"I bet my shirt this movie will kick ass!"

Sadly, in Stephen Norrington's loud, witless and buggery-free movie, that's all they are: heroes. True, Sean Connery's Allan Quatermain is a bit irritable, Jason Flemyng's Jekyll/Hyde is a bit unstable and Peta Wilson's Mina Harker has a bit of a blood-sucking habit. But the deadpan wit, emotional ambivalence and deep-rooted psychoses of Moore's characters are present only in Stuart Townsend's louche, bored Dorian Gray, who also gets the best lines ("Oh, we could be here all day!" he moans when fighting a fellow immortal).

Ironically, Gray is a cinematic addition to Moore's troupe of nut jobs, as is Shane West's grownup Tom Sawyer — although the latter serves no obvious purpose other than attracting American viewers to what is otherwise a Brit-heavy venture.

To say that this tactic did not work upon the film's theatrical release last summer is putting it mildly. Maybe they should have gone with a different plan altogether, such as — and this is just off the top of our heads — *making a good movie.*

BRUCE ALMIGHTY

UNIVERSAL HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪

While you can almost hear Jim Carrey's teeth grind over his being forced back to comedy following his foray into dramatic acting (*The Truman Show, The Majestic*), this is still one of his most enjoyable turns, playing a news reporter granted godlike powers by, um, God (Morgan Freeman). Look out, in particular, for Carrey's on-air meltdown when he discovers a rival, *The Daily Show*'s Steve Carell, has gotten a promotion instead of him ("Back to you . . . fuckers!").

CHARLIE'S ANGELS: FULL THROTTLE

COLUMBIA/TRISTAR HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪

So hyped was the second *Angels* movie that by the time the film finally came out, it seemed like we had already seen it. Perhaps this explains why so few people actually did so. As mindless eye candy goes, though, you could do a lot worse, thanks to its clutch of nicely self-referential gags and the return of sinister-king Crispin Glover. It's also a treat for fans of Demi Moore, who cameos as an Angel-turned-criminal mastermind — assuming their psychiatric hospital has a DVD player.

ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK

MGM/UA HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪✪

Made in 1981 and set in the then far-flung future of 1997, John Carpenter's sci-fi classic imagined a time when New York has been turned into one big penitentiary (not an unlikely notion back before Rudy Giuliani de-whored Times Square). After the president's plane crashes in the Big Apple, Kurt Russell's one-eyed reprobate Snake Plissken must rescue him while simultaneously being more laconic than everyone in sight ("You going to kill me, Snake?" "Not now, I'm too tired"). This Special Edition includes commentary, comic and a deleted, never-before-seen opening sequence.

FREDDY VS. JASON

NEW LINE HOME VIDEO

✪✪

"Place your bets!" demanded the tagline of this long-awaited smackdown between movie serial-killerdom's two most indestructible psychos. Sadly for *Blender*'s bank balance, no one would take our wager that the film would turn out to be a bunch of lame crap. To be fair, there are a couple of nice gags, and the final act's big pointless fight will reward people who like, well, big pointless fights. But personally, we've seen more frightening electricity bills.

THE ADVENTURES OF INDIANA JONES

PARAMOUNT HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪✪

The film that did for crabby archaeology lecturers what *Top Gun* did for jet pilots, the first Indiana Jones movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, remains arguably the best action-adventure film ever made. While the second one, *The Temple of Doom*, reeks, the franchise rallied with its third installment, *The Last Crusade*, thanks to the addition of Sean Connery as Harrison Ford's even crabbier dad. With everyone struggling out of the old-folks' home to make the fourth movie, now

Coming soon: *Indiana Jones and the Elephant's Nut Sack*

Charlie's Angels: Apparently, wasting water is "sexy." Whatever.

Courtesy of 20th Century Fox (The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, 2); courtesy of Lucas Films (The Adventures of Indiana Jones); courtesy of Sony Pictures (Charlie's Angels)

seems an appropriate time to re-acquaint yourself with all things Indy with this box set.

MONTY PYTHON'S MEANING OF LIFE SPECIAL EDITION

UNIVERSAL HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪✪

"Some parts are as serious and as deep as you could wish," Eric Idle says in a new introduction to the Pythons' last movie. "But largely, it's all tits and quite a lot of fish." Oddly, while it's undoubtedly the comedy icons' worst movie, *Meaning of Life* also contains some brilliantly twisted moments, notably the vomit-centric Mr. Creosote sketch. But its real appeal lies in the extras, which range from deleted scenes to a new documentary in which Michael Palin, with a straight face, reveals that John Cleese's buttocks have no split in the middle.

Mr. Show: "Can we please have our bowling ball back?"

MR. SHOW THE COMPLETE THIRD SEASON

HBO HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪✪

DAVID CROSS: LET AMERICA LAUGH

SUB POP

✪✪✪

Speaking of the Pythons, few shows managed to capture their spirit as well as David Cross and Bob Odenkirk's anarchic, venomously anti-establishment sketch series, *Mr. Show*. Ideal for people who love mom's apple pie but suspect that most other aspects of life are a complete crock, this second collection boasts Satanic TV evangelists, step-fairy godmothers and an attempt to find a mate for the last living Native American ("Enjoys peyote. Hates cowboys. No fatties"). Less enjoyable is Cross's new, almost unwatchably rough-and-ready on-tour doc *Let America Laugh*, although it's fun to hear him list influences such as Mama Cass Elliott ("I just love what she sat for") or extemporize a predictably disturbing country lament ("Baby, since you left me/I'm down to fucking the kids . . . ").

OPEN RANGE

BUENA VISTA HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪✪

Ever wondered what cowboys did when they weren't shooting each other? Us neither. For reasons known only to himself, director-star Kevin Costner spends much of this horse opera's first half showcasing the dull life of ordinary, and ornery, horse farmers. The film's climactic, ultraviolent shootout, though, is almost worth the wait, and Robert Duvall is excellent playing Costner's crusty-old-bastard pardner.

SEABISCUIT

UNIVERSAL HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪✪

In which a lazy, tiny, sleepy horse and outsize jockey Tobey Maguire make people forget their Depression-era problems by winning a lot of races. If that sounds unlikely, brace yourself for the fact that this adaptation of Laura Hillenbrand's best-selling nonfiction book is one of the most enjoyable and, we're not afraid to admit it, blub-inducing films of recent years. Includes director's commentary and Jeff Bridges's on-set photographs.

BLENDER APPROVED

The best DVDs of the last three months

SCARFACE

UNIVERSAL HOME VIDEO

Cover the kiddies' eyes and ears, and say hello on DVD to the best non-*Godfather* Al Pacino-starring gangster flick ever. Yo, Tony, you got something on your nose!

THE HOWLIN' WOLF STORY

BLUEBIRD

Idolized by the Rolling Stones, the scariest bluesman of all time gets his due in this two-hour bio, which features hair-raising, previously unseen performance footage.

MUSIC DVDs

AVRIL LAVIGNE
MY WORLD

20TH CENTURY FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪✪✪

This Buffalo, New York, tour stop, videos and tame backstage footage reveal Canada's feisty teen-pop star to be the riot grrrl next door: Avril accidentally locks herself in a chartered jet's bathroom, skateboards with more enthusiasm than skill and even seems shy in the spotlight. Like "Sk8er Boi" and the lovely "Complicated," shots of Avril and band busking on the subway, burping and being mobbed by Japanese fans are more poignant than punk. *NICK CATUCCI*

PAUL WESTERBERG
COME HEAR ME TREMBLE

MAXMEDIA

✪✪✪✪

Once indie-rock's most celebrated boozehound, the Replacements' former singer remains optimistic (and relatively sober) on this tour diary of humble club dates supporting 2002's *Stereo/Mono*: "The second time's different, because I don't remember the first time." *LAUREN HARRIS*

RUSH IN RIO

ZOË/ANTHEM

✪✪✪

Look forward to the solos on Rush albums? This is your dream disc. With 28 songs recorded before an insanely stoked Brazilian crowd in 2002, *Rush in Rio* is packed with loving closeups of instrumental action — plus a bonus documentary and three songs that let fans focus on their favorite member of the band. *J.D. CONSIDINE*

PAUL WELLER
LIVE AT BRAEHEAD

SANCTUARY

✪✪✪

A graying Weller puffs through 30 songs from his 25-year career in Scotland in 2002. The hook? A rare airing of material from his angry post-punk trio the Jam. But the rumor they're getting back together soon only intensifies the resignation in his performance. *ANDY PEMBERTON*

COMPAY SEGUNDO

SHANACHIE

✪✪✪

This mellow 1998 documentary celebrates the Cuban music legend who found international fame late in life as part of the Buena Vista Social Club before his death last summer. While the meandering travelogue sequences could cure insomnia, his sly singing and nimble fretwork on the guitar-like harmonico hit the spot. *JON YOUNG*

U2 GO HOME
LIVE FROM SLANE CASTLE

INTERSCOPE

✪✪✪

The main course here is a 2001 concert that's barnstorming despite lacking *Achtung Baby*-era material. The dessert is a 1984 *Unforgettable Fire* making-of doc that finds Bono's mullet at its most lush and producer Brian Eno introducing himself as Quincy Jones to gullible fans. *CLARK COLLIS*

The Everett Collection (*Mr. Show*); courtesy of Universal Home Video (Scarface)

Mid-life crisis, anyone?

HOT WHEELS

Better buckle up for this flashy street-racing game — it's so fast it'll give you whiplash. By Simon Munk

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND

EA GAMES — GAMECUBE, PC, PS2, XBOX

✪✪✪✪✪

THE LATEST thoroughbred racing game from Entertainment Arts' Need for Speed stable, Underground is specifically aimed at those who wish to emulate the high-octane antics of the *Fast and the Furious* movie franchise but don't relish the idea of ending their Saturday nights being scraped off the road into a body bag.

To this end, this racing game allows players not only to win upgrades (suspension kits, turbo, nitrous, etc.) for its 20-strong array of elite licensed tuner cars, but also customize the suckers with hundreds of aftermarket parts. The result? Seventy-two *billion* variations per vehicle.

Even more exciting is the addition of a "drift" game mode in which, depending on ability, players can score points by forcing their vehicle into a controlled power slide, or smash the hell out of all those hard-earned customizations on the game's incredibly detailed, neon-lit, rain-slicked mean streets. In fact, just about the only thing the *Fast and the Furious* movies have that this game doesn't is the crappy dialogue.

"See, officer? Bobby *can* stand up!"

CRASH TEST DUMMIES

It's not safe to get in even a golf cart with these stars!

DOPEY!
BOBBY BROWN
Lately, Whitney's hubby has racked up more DUIs (two) than hits. Plus, he admits he smoked lots of pot to calm his bipolar disorder. Hey, that's our excuse too!

BOOZY!
KEITH MOON
No license and many car wrecks did not deter the Who's drummer from driving, most regrettably for his chauffeur, whom an inebriated Moon accidentally ran over and killed.

PERVY!
GARY GLITTER
Three DUI convictions in nine years aren't enough warning? British glam-rocker Glitter was also convicted of owning more than 4,000 kiddie-porn pictures.

CALL OF DUTY

ACTIVISION — PC

What separates this WWII shooter from the rest of the grunts? First, a top pedigree — the team behind this previously pounded gamers with Medal of Honor: Allied Assault. Second, variety — you fight as a U.S. paratrooper before D-Day with a squad for backup, a British special-forces soldier sneaking around solo and a Russian conscript alongside a ragtag army. Finally, intensity — you'll come away feeling shell-shocked. And that's a good thing. ✪✪✪✪

FATAL FRAME 2: CRIMSON BUTTERFLY

TECMO — PS2

The Japanese do horror better than we do — witness *Ringu* versus the unscary American remake *The Ring*. In this game, two girls try to escape a haunted village. Their only weapon: an antiquated camera. Snap ghosts to kill them, or take pics of spooky locations for clues. Jarring noises, underlit locations and jumpy black-and-white flashbacks make this burg creepier than the Bates Motel. ✪✪✪✪

FINAL FANTASY X-2

SQUARE ENIX — PS2

With this sequel, the Final Fantasy series has abandoned what it's good at — complex combat and adventures that unfold across vastly detailed worlds — in favor of a flimsy plot and even flimsier-dressed characters. Like a medieval version of Charlie's Angels, the heroine, Yuna, and her two scantily clad chums gallivant around the universe in pursuit of magic spheres. Ratcheting up the action would've been more effective in snagging the male audience. ✪✪✪

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

UBISOFT — GAMECUBE, PC, PS2, XBOX

Lara Croft was wearing diapers rather than hot pants when the first Prince of Persia game came out. In this update, your mission is to undo the damage caused by the enchanted sands of the title. Battle multiple enemies with a sword in one hand and a dagger in the other and run along walls to avoid traps. Like Lara's outings, the plot is riddled with occult clichés, but the action stays lively, so who cares? ✪✪✪✪✪

BLENDER APPROVED

The best GAMES of the last three months

JAK II

SONY — PS2

Swoop through a vast dystopia by hovercar to find the evil baron who imprisoned and tortured you for years. Revenge is a dish best served cold.

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

NINTENDO — GAMECUBE

The best multiplayer racing series ever is back. Drive like a maniac, launch eggs, dodge bananas, laugh like a hyena. Repeat

Tammie Arroyo/Retna Ltd. (Brown and Houston)

WIN THIS STEREO SYSTEM!

Send your completed puzzle to *Blender* Puzzle Contest, 1040 Avenue of the Americas, 22nd floor, New York, New York 10018.

SWEEEEET! Do we know what a non-resonant steel chassis does? No, but who cares? Just hook up this Anthem TLP1 stereo receiver to these Paradigm Monitor Series speakers, and you've got one ass-kicking stereo! Solve this puzzle, cut out your completed version and send it to the address at the left. (Read the official rules at blender.com.) Make sure we get your answer and contact information by January 27, 2004. We'll pick a winner at random and post that winner's name at blender.com/crossword. *Whoo-ha!*

PENCIL ME IN!

Hey, it's *Blender*'s crossword! Starring 28 Across! BY BRENDAN QUIGLEY

ACROSS

1 Wayne Coyne's psychedelic group (two words)

9 Ozzy Osbourne's classic about a triathlete?

10 He's got a black magic woman

11 Where you might find Chris Carrabba confessing

15 Legendary D.C. DIY political-punk outfit

17 Pucker up with this "We Are D-Block" rapper

19 "Deadly" British rock duo with the record *Keep On Your Mean Side* (two words)

20 Doors hit "___ on the Storm"

21 Britpop trio with the hit "Freak Like Me"

25 Ben, once of Radish, now doing the solo thing

28 Genre of Talking Heads, Blondie et al. (two words)

29 Danish duo with the album *Chain Gang of Love*

DOWN

2 They did it all for the nookie

3 Rapper who wants you to hate him now

4 She had constant craving

5 Interpol's first hit

6 Charlie Parker's nickname

7 Aerosmith album ___ *in the Attic*

8 Chroniclers of dust in the wind

12 Beatles hit "___ Prudence"

13 Obie, in Eminem's clique

14 Ziggy Stardust nowadays (two words)

16 R.E.M.'s classic 1988 album

18 *One* ___ *One* (Rolling Stones documentary)

19 Difficult-to-get trip-hopper?

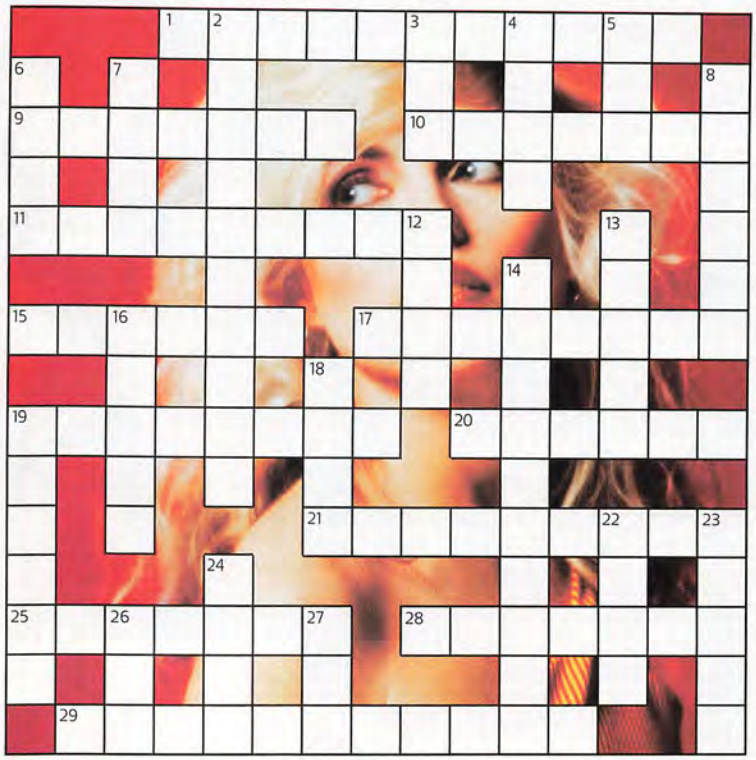
22 "Beat on the ___" (Ramones classic)

23 Miller who kept slipping, slipping, slipping into the future

24 *Earthquake* ___ (Guided by Voices' latest)

26 Warren G time was a G-Funk ___

27 Bruce was born to do this



POP HISTORY! 1865–PRESENT: 50 CENT GETS SHOT

WRITTEN BY CLARK COLLIS AND GABE SORIA. ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN JAY

↑ It is a little-known fact that rapper 50 Cent was first shot way back in 1865.

↑ In 1963, 50 was with another president when he was shot again.

Thanks for lunch, John Lennon.
DAKOTA BLDG.
No worries, 50. Don't you just *love* standing around on steps?
Yeah — you know, I'm gonna take a rain check on that, dawg.

↑ By 1980, the hip-hop star had begun to learn his lesson. . . .

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Alphonse Telymonde (still-lifes, 3); Mick Rock/Star File (Harry); Theo Wargo/Wireimage.com (50 Cent)

Shhh — whisper it: She brought condoms to the interview. She can't be bothered with underwear. She called Paris Hilton a four-letter word that made us blush. Proceed with caution when asking this 22-year-old pop sexpot . . .

BY ROB TANNENBAUM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY F. SCOTT SCHAFER

WHO DOES WILLA FORD THINK SHE IS?

For your self-portrait, you drew a large penis. Why?
Because everyone tells me I'm such a dude. I curse like one of the boys, I eat like one of the boys, I carry on relationships like one of the boys. A chick, but a dude. A he/she.

Is that why you decided to cut your hair short?
Yeah, to become more like a guy. It didn't work, though. All the sports bras in the world aren't really gonna hide these tits.

How are you like a guy in relationships?
"Commitment? Oh, God, I'm starting to itch." I'm a motherfucking *P.I.M.P.* Why have one boyfriend when you can have multiples? I had a boyfriend, Nick [Carter], and then I got back to my old self — no itching problems.

Is this the kind of lingerie you wear around the house?
Guys always think it's a pain to have tits: "You have to wear a bra." I'm like, "You don't *have* to wear one." I'm a no-frills, no-underwear, no-bra kind of chick. My real name's Amanda, and my friends call me Mando Commando.

What do you hate to spend money on?
Waxing. It's miserable! Imagine somebody sticking a sticky thing to your balls and going *fffffffssssht*. Sorry for the graphic.

So why do it?
The first time I ever got waxed, it was horrible. I left the place crying: "I look like a 5-year-old." At that point, I kept the landing strip, but now I've graduated to the full Brazilian. I'm hairless — I figure that if you're gonna wax some of it, you might as well wax all of it.

How much is a quart of milk?
[*Snorts*] Dude, is that a Jessica Simpson question?

Never mind — we'll move on. What's your favorite legal drug?
Ambien. I'm, like — surprise, surprise — an insomniac. And the doctor's like, "This will knock you out." But I started hallucinating. And the next thing you know, I stole some neighbors' plants, and they were on my porch in the morning. I went to my doctor and said, "No matter how much I beg you, can you never give me these again?"

Have you ever videotaped yourself having sex, like Paris Hilton?
No. Because I'm not dumb [*laughs*]. I'm not her biggest fan. She's a cunt. I met her at a fashion show, before Willa Ford blew up. I was in her way in the makeup chair, and she said, "Who the fuck is this? And why are they in my fucking makeup?" Back off, bitch! I'll watch that video with pride.

How would you characterize your taste in sex?
I'm completely open to it, except for one thing: There is no back-door entry in Ms. Willa Ford.

What do you have in your fancy Louis Vuitton bag?
Pictures of my niece, antibacterial hand stuff, lip gloss, $20, a diamond cross necklace and Lifestyles Ultra-Thin condoms, with lubricant.

Did you bring those for the interview?
See, that's the funny part. I'm not a ho. Willa Ford's a bad girl, but she's a tease. What's more evil: if a girl has sex with you, or if she almost does, but walks away? That's much more of a bad girl. This might be a big let-down to guys, but I could count the men I've had sex with on the fingers of one hand.

If you could change one thing about your body, what would it be?
I'd get a sixth finger. [BLENDER]

"I'm a no-frills, no-underwear kind of chick."

COAT FROM FILTH MART. BRA AND PANTIES BY AGENT PROVOCATEUR AT HENRI BENDEL. SHOES BY BRUNO FRISONI

Hair: Creighton for Suzce Salon NYC. makeup: Scott McMahan at Bruni Management. styling: Beda Zamorska at Agnes Loft

REMEMBER: THE WAGES OF SIN ARE AN EXPENSIVE INFECTION

LOVE MUSIC, LOVE BLENDER

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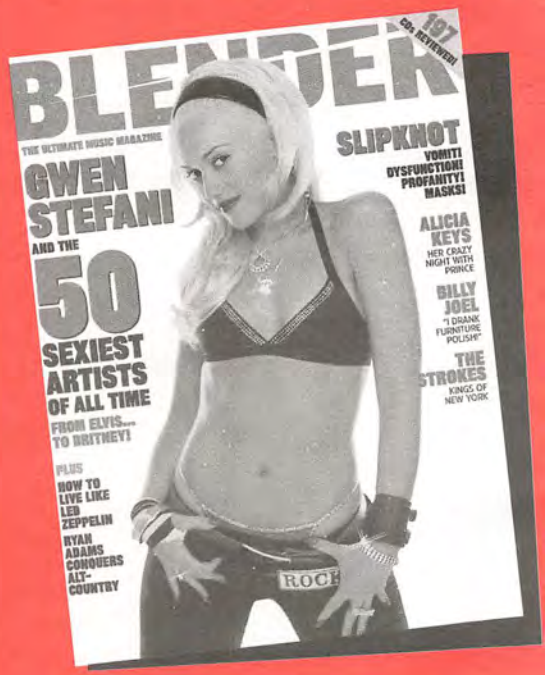

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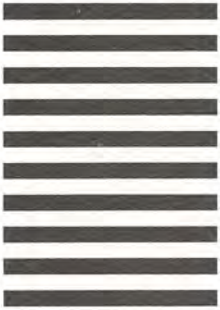

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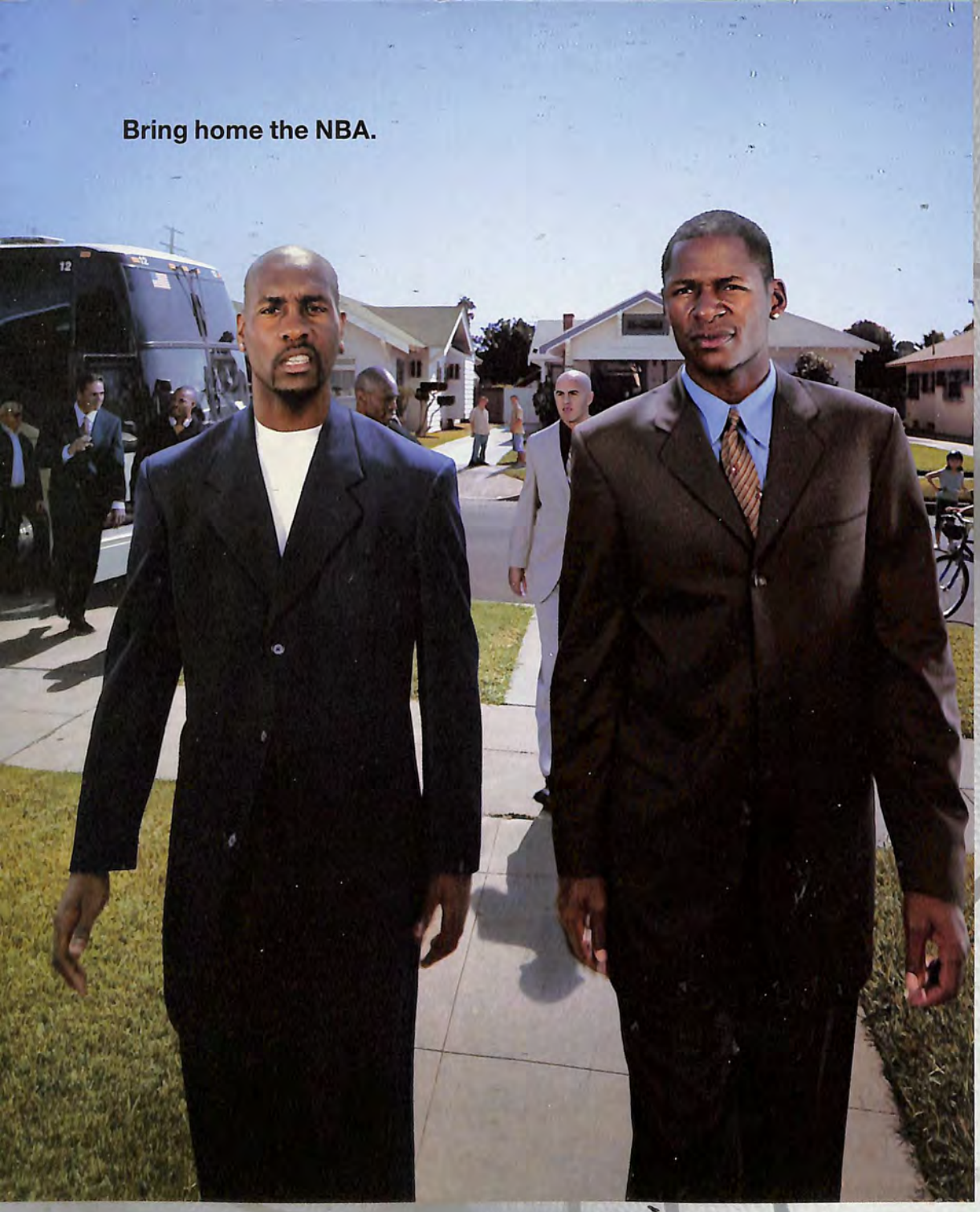

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